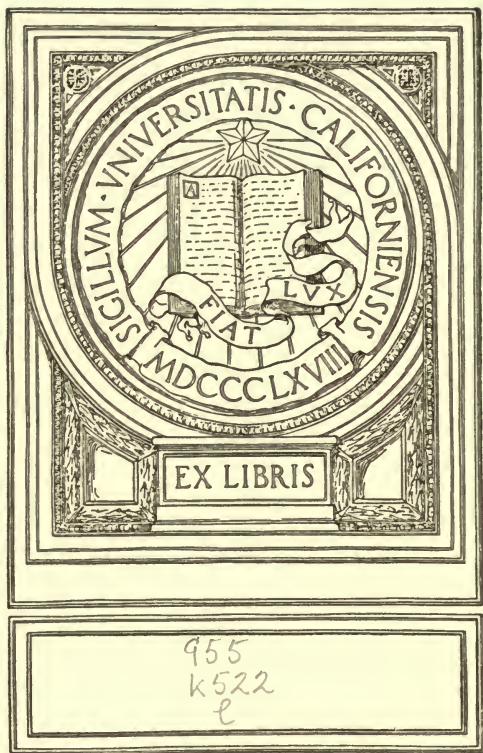


LANIER OF THE CAVALRY



GENERAL
CHARLES
KING ★ ★ ★



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LANIER OF THE CAVALRY



"TELL HIM THAT I'D LIKE AN EXTENSION OF ARREST."

Page 143

Lanier *of the* Cavalry

or

A Week's Arrest

By

GENERAL CHARLES KING

Author of "The Colonel's Daughter," "Marion's Faith,"

"Captain Blake," "Foes in Ambush,"

"Under Fire," etc.

With illustrations by

FRANK McKERNAN



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"TELL HIM THAT I'D LIKE AN EXTENSION OF ARREST." <i>Frontispiece</i>	
"MR. LANIER, GO TO YOUR ROOM IN ARREST" ..	26
"BUT DO YOU MEAN COLONEL BUTTON ACCUSED MR. LANIER OF THOSE LETTERS!"	195



LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

I

THE sun was sinking low beyond the ford of the foaming Platte. The distant bluffs commanding the broad valley of the Sweetwater stood sharp and clear against the westward skies. The smoke from the camp-fires along the stream rose in misty columns straight aloft, for not so much as a breath of breeze had wafted down from the far snow fields of Cloud Peak, or the sun-sheltered rifts of the Big Horn. The flag at the old fort, on the neighboring height, clung to the staff with scarcely a flutter, awaiting the evening salute of the trumpets and the roar of the sunset gun.

The long June day had seemed unusually unconscionably long to the young girl fitting restlessly about the vine-covered

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

porch of the roadside cottage. She laid the big binocular aside, for perhaps the twentieth time within the hour, with a sigh of impatience, a piteous quiver about the pretty, rosebud mouth, a wistful, longing look in the dark and dreamy eyes. Ever since stable call, and her father's departure to his never-neglected duty, she had hovered about that shaded nook, again and again searching the northward slopes and ridges. The scouts had been in three hours ago, reporting the squadron only a mile or so behind. It should have dismounted, unsaddled, fed, watered, and groomed by this time, and Rawdon should have been here at her side—Rawdon, whom she had not seen for three mortal days—Rawdon, whom, for three mortal weeks before the march, she had not missed seeing sometimes several times a day, even when he was on guard—Rawdon, whom she had never set eyes on before the first of April, and whom now she looked upon as the foremost soldier

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

of the regiment, when in point of fact he was but a private trooper, serving the first part of his first enlistment, in the eyes of his elders a mere recruit, and in those of Sergeant Fitzroy an unspeakable thing.

Another long peep through the signal glasses, another sigh, and then she came, this girl of seventeen, in her dainty white frock, and plumped herself dejectedly down on the top step, with two very shapely, slender, slippered feet displayed on the second below, two dimpled elbows planted on her knees, two flushed, soft, rounded cheeks buried in two long and slender hands. Away over at the stables she could hear the tap, tap, of curry-comb on brush-back, as the First Squadron groomed its fidgety mounts. Away up the valley the voices of the children in the Arapahoe village rose gleefully on the air. Away up among the barracks and quarters at the fort, the band of the Infantry was playing sweet melody. Peace, content, and harmony were roundabout

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

her, but the dark eyes, welling with unshed tears, told of a troubled heart.

And then of a sudden the tears were dashed away and the girl sprang to her feet. A blithe voice hailed her from within.

“Dey ’s comin’, Miss Dora—two on ’em, at least—like enough to be twin brudders.”

The girl ran to the northward corner again and gazed out across the rushing, swollen river. Not so much as a sign of a dust-cloud to tell of marching cavalry, and she turned again, with rebuke ready on her tongue, but again the voice from within:

“Comin’ *t’other* way, chile. Must ha’ took the lower fohd and rode roun’ back o’ de stables,” and, with the words, a laughing “mammy” came bustling to the front door, a cool white pitcher in one hand, a tray with glasses in the other.

“Ah know well ’nuff what brings de lieutenant round dis way. As for dat—

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

trash—wid him’’—and here came a chuckle of delight at her own wit—‘‘he just cain’t help hisself.’’ But Dora was not listening. Light as a bird she had flown to the other end of the little porch and was gazing out through the honey-suckles with all her soul in her eyes.

Coming up the slope at easy canter rode a young officer, with broad-brimmed hat and dusty field dress, alert, slender, sinewy, of only medium height and not more than twenty-five years, with a handsome, sun-tanned, smiling face, a picture of healthful, wholesome young manhood. and behind him, at the regulation distance, came what Aunt Chloe, in her ‘‘darky’’ dialect more than once had declared ‘‘the very spit of him’’—a young trooper in similar slouch hat and dusty field dress, younger, probably, by three or four years, but to the full as alert and active, as healthful and wholesome to look at, his face now all aglow with a light that was sweet for girlish eyes to see.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

The leader swung his hat and blithely shouted as he curbed his eager horse. "Howdy, Miss Dora. Bless your heart, Aunt Chloe, I knew you 'd have the butter-milk ready! No, Rawdon, I shan't dismount"—this to the young "orderly," who had sprung from saddle and, with his rein over his arm, stood ready to take that of his officer. "Merciful saints! but isn't that good after thirty miles of alkali!" He had swallowed a brimming goblet of the cool, refreshing drink, and Chloe was delightedly refilling. "Father home, Miss Dora?" he went on cheerily.

"Over at the stables, Mr. Lanier," was the smiling answer. The face of the girl was sunshine and roses now, yet merely a glance or two had passed, for Trooper Rawdon had instantly swung once more into saddle and was reining back to his place.

"Stables going *yet?* Why, I thought it must be supper time. Colonel sent me ahead to find him. Three of 'E' Troop

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

horses act like they 'd been eating loco-weed. That 's what kept us."

"Colonel Button 's always findin' some way of sendin' you in ahaid, Marse Lanier," grinned Chloe. "Ah don't wonder dey says *you* can do anything you like an' never get hauled up for it."

"You're a gossip, Auntie," laughed Lanier. "The colonel would cinch me quick as the next man if I happened to rub his fur the wrong way. One more swig now and I 'm off. Tastes almost like the South again, does n't it?"

"Lak de *Souf!*" Aunt Chloe bristled, indignant. "Sho! Dat's no more lak de buttermilk *we* makes dan dat ar' hawse is lak de racers at Belle Mead. Cows got to have white clover, Marse Lanier, an' white clover don't grow in dis Gawd foh-saken country."

"It 's good all the same. Thank you, heartily, Miss Dora. You, too, Auntie. Er—Rawdon, you dismount and wait for Doctor Mayhew in case I miss him. Give

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

him the colonel's message and say the squadron should be in by 7.30." And with that and a wave of his hand and a smiling good-night, he took the rein of the troop horse and away they sped to the stables.

Then Chloe vanished opportunely. The young trooper stood one instant looking gratefully after his officer and those curvetting steeds, eager to reach their home and supper. Dora, with glistening eyes and glowing cheeks, retreated within the shelter of the bowered porch. Then, bounding up the steps and turning with outstretched arms, thither Rawdon followed.

Ten minutes later, at swift trot, came a third horse and rider, the horse all that a cavalry horse should be in gait and build, the rider well nigh as marked in build and proportions. He, too, was well-made and muscular, though somewhat heavy and stocky; he was as soldierly, if not as young, as the two so recently there in

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

saddle. It was the face that repelled, for it was black with wrath and suspicion. In front of the little cottage of the veterinary surgeon he hurriedly dismounted, threw the reins over the post at the horse-block, and strode, angering, through the gate. The murmur of blissful voices had ceased at first sight of him. Dora, her face paling, met him at the head of the steps.

Hardly noticing her by look or word, he brushed by, turned sharp to his left, and in an instant the two men were face to face.

“Rawdon,” spoke the new-comer, his tone curt, domineering, insolent, “what do you mean by letting an officer lead your horse to stables? Go you to yours at once! Take my horse, too, and groom *him*.”

Rawdon flushed to his forehead, said not a word, came forth into the light, and then turned squarely.

“My orders were from Lieutenant Lanier, sergeant, and they were distinctly to stop here.”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Go you at once and do as I say,” was the instant rejoinder, and the veins in the sergeant’s face were swelled almost to bursting. His eyes were fiery, his lips were quivering in his wrath.

“Indeed, Sergeant Fitzroy,” began the girl rebukefully, “those were Lieutenant Lanier’s orders.”

“Hang Lieutenant Lanier’s orders! No stripling sub can give such orders in this regiment. How dare you delay there? Go, you townskip, or I ’ll kick you through the——”

But now with blazing eyes Dora Mayhew threw herself in front of him. Tall, lithe, and slender herself, she seemed just the height of the young trooper she defied. “If you raise hand or foot against Rawdon, Sergeant Fitzroy, it’s the last time you come inside our gate. No, I ’ll *not* stand aside! Before you strike him you ’ll have to strike me.”

And then and there Sergeant Fitzroy realized that the fears and forebodings of

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the past month were more than grounded. If angered before, he was maddened now. Brushing her light form aside with one sweep of his powerful arm, he sprang forward at the young soldier's throat just as a tall, lean man, with grizzled beard but athletic build, bounded up the steps and caught his wrist.

"None of that in my house, Fitzroy!" came the order, stern and compelling. "In God's name, what does this mean?" And, still grasping the sergeant's arm, the speaker, with his face nearly as white as his stable frock, fairly backed the raging Englishman against the wooden pillar and held him there.

"Let go, Mayhew!" raved the sergeant. "I've ordered that young rip to stables, and he refuses to go."

"He was ordered to stay, papa, until you came," protested Dora, her eyes ablaze. "Lieutenant Lanier—*that* man's superior officer—gave him the colonel's message to you."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“He was ordered to go by Lieutenant Lanier’s superior, the officer-of-the-day, whom I represent,” was Fitzroy’s answer; “and the longer he stays the worse ’t will be for him.”

“No officer ever authorized you to come to my quarters and lay violent hands on a man behaving like a gentleman, which *you* are not,” was the cutting rejoinder of the older man, and it stung Fitzroy to fresh fury. Was he, the model rider of the regiment, to be braved like this, and in presence of the girl he loved?

“Let go! You *must*, Mayhew!” he hissed through clenched teeth. “You have no authority. You are only a civilian. You can be broke and fired if I report this—outrage—and what I know. Let go! he shouted, freeing himself by furious effort. “Now, you, Rawdon, come with me. No. Stop! Corporal Watts!” he shouted, to a non-commissioned officer, swinging up the pathway toward the guard-house on the bluff, four men of the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

guard at his back. "Come this way," he continued, for at first no attention was paid to his hail. "Come here and take charge of this man. It 's the order of the officer-of-the-day."

Doubtfully, reluctantly, leaving his patrol disgustedly waiting, Corporal Watts slowly descended the incline, crossed the broad, hard-beaten road, then, obviously embarrassed at the presence of Dora Mayhew, demanded further information before he obeyed.

By this time, Rawdon, pale and silent, was standing at the foot of the steps, indignation, resentment, and trouble all mingling in his face. Too well he and other young soldiers had learned to know the weight of Sergeant Fitzroy's spite. But the trouble in his eyes gave way to sudden relief. Two officers were coming swiftly round the corner of the corral, Lanier foremost.

"I say again, Corporal Watts, this man is to be taken in charge at once. It is

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Captain Curbit's order as officer-of-the-day. I came direct from him," was Fitzroy's final order. But it failed.

"Do nothing of the kind, Corporal Watts," said a quiet voice, at sound of which Sergeant Fitzroy whirled about and turned, if a possible thing, a full shade redder. There at the gate stood Lieutenant Lanier. There, a dozen yards away, but trudging fast as dignity would permit, came the officer-of-the-day.

A jerk of the head to the corporal, in response to his instant salute, and that young soldier, much relieved, strode away to join his men. Then Captain Curbit turned on Sergeant Fitzroy.

"You told me nothing of the facts in this case, sir. Lieutenant Lanier says he *directed* this man to wait here, with the colonel's message, while he rode to stables. Pardon me, Miss Dora. Come this way, sergeant."

And there was nothing for it but to obey. Abashed, humiliated, rebuked and

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

in *her* presence, where he had looked but a moment before to humble and humiliate his rival, Fitzroy, could only lift his hand in salute, follow the captain out of ear-shot, and there make his plea as best he could, leaving Lanier and the silent young trooper, Dora and her grave-faced old father, in possession of the field.

For a moment they watched Fitzroy, eagerly gesticulating as he stood at attention before his superior.

"He 'll give you no more trouble, I fancy," said Lanier, in low tone, to the veterinarian. "I 'll say good-night again, Miss Dora;" and he walked cheerily away, but Mayhew looked after him long and anxiously, then upon the young people before him, then upon the still protesting sergeant across the way.

"Maybe not—maybe not," he muttered, with sorrowing shake of the head; "but few men can give more trouble than—him, when he 's minded, and I reckon he 's minded now."

II

NEARLY six long months went the regiment afield on the hardest campaign of its history. Then at last by way of reward it had been ordered in to big Fort Cushing for the winter. It was close to town, close to the railway—things that in those days, thirty years ago, seemed almost heavenly. The new station was blithe and merry with Christmas preparations and pretty girls. All the married officers' families had rejoined. Half a dozen fair visitors had come from the distant East. The band was good; the dancing men were many; the dancing floor was fine, and the dance they were having on Friday night, December 16, was all that even an army dance could be until just after eleven o'clock. Then something happened to cast a spell over everybody.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Bob Lanier was officer-of-the-guard. Bob had asked the colonel to let him turn over his sword to a brother officer, who, being in mourning, could not dance, and the colonel had curtly said no. The colonel's wife was amazed; she did not dream he *could* do such a thing. Six girls were sorrowful, three were incensed, and one was cruelly hurt. She was under parental orders to start for home on the morrow. It was to be her last dance at the fort. She liked Bob Lanier infinitely more than she liked her father's dictum that she must like him not at all. As for Bob Lanier, the garrison knew he loved her devotedly even before she knew it herself.

Of course she came to the dance. As the guest of Captain and Mrs. Sumter she even had to go up and smile on the colonel and his wife, who were receiving. She and Kate Sumter had been classmates—roommates—at Vassar, and Kate, born and reared in the army, had never been

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

quite content until her friend could come to visit the regiment—her father's home.

A winsome pair they were, these two "sweet girl graduates" of the June gone by, while the regiment was stirring up the Sioux on the way to the Big Horn and Yellowstone. Everybody had lavish welcome for them, and to Miriam Arnold the month at Fort Cushing had been quite a dream of delight, until there came a strange and sudden missive from her father, bidding her break off a visit that was to have lasted until February, *and* all relations with Lieutenant' Robert Ray Lanier.

Up to this moment these relations had been delightful, yet indefinite. For reasons of his own Mr. Lanier had made no avowal of his love to her, even though he had disclosed it to every one else. He was a frank, fearless, out-and-out young soldier, a prime favorite with most of his fellows. Bob had his enemies—frank men generally have. He could hardly believe

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the evidence of his ears when, just after sunset roll-call, he had confidently approached the colonel with his request and had received the colonel's curt reply. Time and again during the recent campaign the veteran soldier now in command had shown marked liking for this energetic young officer. Then came the march to the settlements, and sudden, unaccountable change. Twice or thrice within the past ten days he had shown singular coldness and disfavor; to-night strong and sudden dislike, and Lanier, amazed and stung, could only salute and turn away.

Everybody by half past ten had heard of it, and most men marvelled. Nobody at eleven o'clock was very much surprised when, in the midst of the lovely Lorelei waltz of Keler Bela, a group of young maids, matrons, and officers near the doorway opened out, as it were, and Bob Lanier, officer-of-the-guard, came gracefully gliding and circling down the room,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Miriam Arnold's radiant, happy face looking up into his. It was a joy to watch them dance together, but not to watch the colonel's face when he caught sight of them. Except Lanier, every officer present was in full uniform, without his sabre. Lanier was in the undress uniform of the guard, but with the sabre—not the long, curved, clumsy, steel-scabbarded weapon then used by the cavalry, but a light, Prussian hussar sword that he had evidently borrowed for the occasion, for it belonged to Barker, the adjutant, as everybody knew—as Barker realized to his cost when in less than ten seconds the commander summoned him.

“Mr. Barker, you will at once place Mr. Lanier in arrest for quitting his guard and disobeying my orders.”

“I shall have to—get my sabre, sir,” stammered the adjutant, meaning the regulation item over at his quarters.

“There it is, sir, before your eyes. Mr. Lanier, at least, can have no further use

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

for it until a court-martial acts on his case.”

“Good Lord!” thought Barker, “how can I go up to Bob and tell him to turn over that sword so that I can properly place him in arrest—and here, too—and of all times——”

But the colonel would brook no delay. “Direct Mr. Lanier to report to me in the anteroom,” said he, marching thither forthwith, and that message the luckless adjutant had to deliver at once.

Bob saw it coming in Barker’s sombre visage. The girl on his arm understood nothing (but noted the hush that had fallen, even though the music went on; saw Barker coming, and something told her it meant trouble, and turned her sweet face white.

“Miss Arnold, may I offer myself as a substitute for the rest of this dance? Bob, the chief wants to see you a second,” was the best that Barker could think of. They praised him later for his “men-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

dacity," yet what he said was true to the letter. It took little more than a second for the colonel to say:

"Mr. Lanier, go to your room in arrest," and Bob saluted, turned, and went, unslinging the sword on the way.

Now, that was the first touch to spoil that memorable December night, but it was only a feather to what followed. The waltz soon ceased, but the colonel called for an extra, and led out a lady from town, the wife of a future senator. "Keep this thing going," he cautioned his adjutant and certain of his personal following, which was large, and loyally they tried, but the piteous face of the girl he had left at the door of the ladies' dressing-room and in the hands of Mrs. Sumter was too much for Barker. Moreover, he much liked Lanier and bemoaned his fate.

Colonel Button was "hopping mad," as the quartermaster put it, and as all men could see, yet at what? Lanier's



"Mr. LANTIER, GO TO YOUR ROOM IN ARREST."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

offence, when fairly measured, had not been so grave. It had happened half a dozen times that the officer-of-the-guard, making his rounds and visiting sentries in the course of a dance evening, would casually drop in by one door and out by another, taking a turn or two on the floor, perhaps—"just waltzing in and waltzing out," as they said—and no one the worse for it, even when the colonel happened to be present. Nor could men now see what it was that so angered the commander against Lanier.

"Disobeyed his orders flatly," suggested Captain Snaffle, who stood by the colonel on every occasion when not himself the object of that officer's satire or censure.

"Disobeyed no order," said Sumter, as stoutly. "Simply did what many another has done, and nobody hurt. Nor would Lanier have been noted, perhaps, if he had not first asked to turn over his sword to Trotter."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

But even that could not fully account for the colonel's rancor, and, though the music and dance went on, men and women both, with clouded faces, found themselves asking the question: "What could have angered him so at Lanier?" And in a corner of the ladies' dressing-room two pretty girls, with difficulty soothed by Mrs. Sumter, were vainly striving not to cry their eyes out—Kate Sumter dismayed at the almost uncontrollable grief of her friend, who, strange to military measures, imagined that Bob's arrest was but the prelude to his being shot at sunrise, or something well nigh as terrible.

Not ten minutes after Lanier went out, and went silent but in unspeakable wrath, Paymaster Scott came dawdling in, and though but a casual visitor at the post, just back that day from a tour of the northward camps and forts along the Indian border, he saw at a glance that something had gone amiss. The colonel was laboriously waltzing; three or four

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

couples were mechanically following suit, but most of the men were gathered about the buffet, and most of the women huddled at the dressing-room door, and Scott, marching over to pay his respects to the colonel's wife, and explain his coming at so late an hour, noted instantly the trouble in her serious face. He had known her long and liked her well, as, despite occasional differences at whist, he did her husband. Captain Snaffle was speaking with her at the moment. Mrs. Snaffle was at her side. "Why did they tell her at all?" Mrs. Snaffle was asking, with much spirit and obvious effort to control a racial tendency to double the final monosyllables. "Sure they might have known 't would sc—frighten the life out of her."

"Sc—frighten *who?*" asked Scott, who was friends with everybody and, for more reasons than his office, a welcome guest wherever he went. Snaffle shot a warning glance at his wife, which fell, as he said, "unaided."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“It ’s Bobby Lanier, meejor, only you must n’t sp—refer—to it.” Mrs. Snaffle, when self-controlled, discreetly shunned such vowels as betrayed her origin, a totally useless precaution, since all men knew it and liked her none the less.

“Lanier? Oh, yes, I thought it was Bob I saw a while ago streaking it across the parade. It ’s bright as day in the moonlight with the snow. What ’s Bob got to do with frightening folk?” And now he was shaking hands with all three.

“Something very unfortunate has happened, major,” said Mrs. Button. “Mr. Lanier was officer-of-the-guard and asked to attend the dance, Mr. Trotter offering to take charge of the guard. Colonel Button felt compelled to decline, and—he came any way. You know, of course, *that* could n’t be overlooked.”

“H’m,” said Scott gravely and reflectively. “And who is so frightened?”

“Miriam Arnold; a very charming girl who is visiting the Sumters. Indeed, it

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

looks as though she cared for him. It 's no secret that he 's in love with *her*."

"Ah, yes. Well, then, it was she I saw getting into the Fosters' sleigh at the side door."

"Oh, I think not! I *hope* not!" cried Mrs. Button, a flush mounting to her face. "I wanted to say a reassuring word after a little——"

But at the moment Mrs. Sumter was seen coming forth from the dressing-room. Half a dozen women were upon her at once with sympathetic inquiries. To these she spoke briefly, yet courteously, and, escaping on the arm of the regimental quartermaster, came straightway to Mrs. Button.

"You will forgive my girls for not saying good-night," she cordially spoke. "Miriam has been quite upset by a letter from home; and this little—episode—this evening, which she cannot understand as we do, has so unstrung her that Mrs. Foster offered to send them over home

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

in her sleigh. The side door had been barred, but Mr. Horton pried it open for them, so they had no need to come this way, and face everybody—and explain.”

“You know how sorry I am,” said Mrs. Button. “Of course they are excusable for leaving as they did. Why, where are the others going?”

The music had suddenly stopped. There was a scurry on the part of the men at the anteroom. Several had run to the entrance. Others were following. Some one among the women, with startled eyes and paling face, sprang up saying, “It’s fire”—always a dread at wind-swept Cushing. Almost at the same instant the colonel and Scott reached the veranda without. A dozen officers were there, intent and listening. “I tell you I heard it plainly,” said one of their number, “and the Foster sleigh is n’t back.”

“Heard what, sir?” demanded the colonel. “What’s the trouble?”

“A cry for help—or something, over

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

yonder. Barker and Blake are gone. There was a stir at the guard-house, too."

And as though to confirm this much, at least, there presently appeared round the corner of the building the sergeant of the guard, in his fur cap and overcoat, and with him a burly soldier, bleeding at the nose and bristling with wrath. One hand covered a damaged eye; with the other he saluted Captain Snaffle, who had edged to the front of the group.

"Sir, I have to report Trooper Rawdon assaulting a non-commissioned officer."

For an instant there was silence. Then Major Scott gave tongue.

"Trooper Rawdon!" cried he, "why he 's been with me nearly a month, and now has a month's furlough from General Crook. He 's the best man of the escort."

"Refused to obey my orders to go to his quarters, sir, and assaulted me when I tried to enforce 'em. Sergeant Blunt says he won't confine him unless Captain Snaffle orders it."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

One moment, sergeant," interposed Colonel Button. "Has any disturbance—any cry for help—been heard at the guard-house,—or was this the explanation?" And he looked with disfavor on the battered complainant.

"Number Five, sir, has n't called off half past 'leven. I've sent the corporal to see what's the matter."

"Number Five!" cried two or three men at the instant, and without a word Captain Sumter hurried away, on a bee line across the snow-covered parade, following the tracks of the adjutant.

"Number Five!" repeated the colonel. "That's just back of Sumter's quarters;" and he stepped out into the moonlight for clearer view.

Afar over across the glistening level a few lights glimmered faintly in the row of officers' quarters, bounding the northward side of the garrison, but neither along their front nor that of the westward row was there sign of moving humanity.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

The moon at its full, in that rare, clear atmosphere, illuminated the post, the frozen slopes beyond, and the dazzling range of the Rockies, with a radiance that rendered objects visible almost as at mid-day. Only the hurrying form of Captain Sumter could be seen half way across the parade. The Fosters' sleigh, that by this time should have been back at the assembly room, was nowhere in sight. Sumter's quarters were about the middle of the row. Lanier's were at the eastward end. For the moment the complaint of the aggrieved sergeant was ignored. All men stood waiting, watching. Then, on a sudden, two or three black forms darted from the shadow of the middle quarters. One came running out across the parade, hardly slackened speed at the hail of Captain Sumter, pointed back with one hand, shouted something that doubled Sumter's pace, but hurried onward toward the group.

It was Conroy, corporal-of-the-guard.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“The adjutant orders me to report Number Five sick, sir,” he panted to the colonel. “I found him all doubled up in the coal-shed back of the major’s. ’T was n’t him hollered. ’T was somebody at Captain Sumter’s. They got the steward over from the hospital, but they want the sergeant and some of the guard to search the back buildings.”

“*Who* wants them?” demanded the colonel.

“The adjutant, sir. Lieutenant Blake ’s with him. There has been some prowlers—and the young ladies were frightened.”

“They are safely home?” asked the colonel. “Then where ’s the sleigh?”

“They ’re home all right, sir, and the sleigh went on out of the east gate—to the store, I suppose. Number Six did n’t stop it——”

“One moment,” interposed the colonel. “Sergeant-of-the-guard, take four of your men and report to Captain Sumter; or to

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the adjutant. Now, corporal, when was this cry heard?"

"Just after the young ladies got home, sir—leastwise that 's what I was told. We did n't hear it at the guard-house."

"Was the officer-of-the-guard over there?"

"Not the—new one, sir, but——" And then the corporal suddenly stopped, contrite and troubled.

"But what?" demanded the colonel, instant suspicion in his eyes and tone. "Do you mean that Lieutenant Lanier was there—out of his quarters?"

"Out of his head, if he was," growled the paymaster, who loved him well and was deeply concerned over his trouble.

"I—I did n't see him, sir," answered the young soldier, but in manner so confused that it simply added to the commander's suspicion.

"Come with me, Horton," said the colonel to his quartermaster, and turning

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

back for his cap and overcoat. Then once again the voice of the aggrieved and importunate sergeant was heard, this time with convincing appeal.

“I beg the colonel’s pardon, but if he wants to get the truth as to this night’s business, it would be well to arrest Trooper Rawdon, or he ’ll be off for good and all.”

“Find him, then, sergeant-of-the-guard, and have it done,” said Button. “Report it to the officer-of-the-day as my order.”

III

THAT ended the dance, but not the excitement. Women and girls were seeking their wraps even before the corporal came, and now went twittering homeward, each on the arm of her escort, except in the case of those allied forces, the wives of certain seniors, who long had lived, moved, and ruled in the regiment, and now in eager yet guarded tones were discussing the events of the hour gone by. With these went Mrs. Foster, her husband having joined the searching party, and her sleigh, instead of returning, being still missing and unaccounted for.

Not yet midnight, and in the space of less than one hour all Fort Cushing had been stirred by the news. A most popular and prominent young officer had been

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

placed in close arrest. A prominent, if not most popular, sergeant, had been pummelled. An alarming scene of some kind had occurred at the quarters of Captain Sumter. No one outside of the immediate family knew just what had happened, and those inside cared not to tell. Mrs. Sumter had hurried away the minute she learned that her husband had gone. The colonel, sternly silent, led his wife to their door, and there left her, saying he had summoned certain officers to join him at once, and she, who ruled him in all matters domestic almost as she managed the children, knew well that when roused he would brook no interference in matters professional, and Bob Lanier, a prime favorite of hers, had in some way managed to fall under the ban of his extreme displeasure.

At the office were presently assembled the colonel, the adjutant, the quartermaster, the post surgeon, and to them came Paymaster Scott. At the "store," the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

only club-room they had in those days, were gathered half the commissioned officers of the post. At Sumter's there kept coming and going by twos and threes, from all along the officers' line, a succession of sympathetic callers, who left even more mystified than when they arrived. Mrs. Sumter was aloft with Kate and their guest, and, as the captain civilly but positively told all visitors, "had to be excused. One of the girls was "somewhat hysterical." Miriam had had a fright in the dark on their return home and screamed. Something foolish, probably, but none the less effective. No! Sumter thought Mrs. Sumter would need no help, yet he was so much obliged to the several who suggested going up just to see if they could n't "do something." Captain Sumter was a devoted husband and father, a capital officer, and a gentleman to the core, but the captain could be just a trifle distant at times, and this was one of them.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Another house was virtually closed to question. To the disappointment of many and the disapprobation of a few, Bob Lanier had closeted himself with his class-mate and most intimate friend "Dad" Ennis; then, after a brief colloquy with Barker, the adjutant, had caused a big card to be tacked on his door whereon was crayoned in bold black letters "BUSY." But at quarter past twelve the assistant surgeon, Doctor Schuchardt, called, as was known, for the second time, and entered without ceremony. When the officer-of-the-day came tramping along the boardwalk at 12.30, and turned in at the gate, he struck the panel with the hilt of his sabre, by way of hint that his call was official and not to be denied. Ennis, therefore, came to the door, but came with gloomy brow.

"I am ordered by Colonel Button to ask certain questions of Lieutenant Lanier," said the official from the depths of his fur cap.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“How ’s that, Doc?” called Ennis, over his massive shoulder. “Can your patient see the officer-of-the-day?”

“Not yet, with my consent,” came the stout answer.

“Shout your questions, captain,” sang out the patient, with much too little humility of manner, yet Lanier knew Curbit well and knew his mission to be unwelcome.

Therefore, in Captain Curbit’s most official tones, *ab imo pectore*, came question the first:

“Is Trooper Rawdon in hiding anywhere about your quarters?”

To which, truculently, came response in Lanier’s unmistakable voice:

“He is not, if *I* know it.”

“Do you know or suspect where he is?”

“Neither. And there is no reason why I should.”

“Have you seen him—to-night?”

An instant’s pause; then, “I don’t know whether I have or not.”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“You don’t *know*?” exclaimed Curbit, puzzled and beginning to bristle.

“I don’t *know*,” repeated Lanier, positive and beginning to rejoice.

“Suppose the colonel tells me to explain that,” began Curbit, but Doctor Schuchardt set his foot down summarily.

“Here,” said he, “this thing’s got to stop;” and he came to the door in his shirt sleeves, leaning half way out, with one hand behind him. “Lanier’s in a highly nervous and excited state. He has had a fall—and I’m trying to get him to bed and asleep. He doesn’t know—whom—he has seen since he got home in arrest, and you can say so for me.”

“All right Shoe,” was the philosophical answer. “It’s none o’ my funeral, and personally I don’t give a cuss if they *never* find him, but there are just s-teen reasons why the Old Man wants to see that young man Rawdon forthwith, and as many for believing he’s skipped.”

“Then skip after him. You can track

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

anything but a ghost in this new-fallen snow.”

Curbit lowered his voice. “That’s exactly the trouble, doctor. Go to the back of the quarters and see for yourself. His trail starts—and ends—*here*.”

In all its history Fort Cushing had never known such a day of bewilderment as that which followed. Guard mounting was held as usual at eight A.M., and Colonel Button, awaiting in his office the coming of the old and the new officers-of-the-day, directed his adjutant to drop his own work at their entrance and give attention to what took place. Half a dozen other officers, with little or no business to transact at that hour, made it their business to be present, drawn thither from sheer sympathy, as some declared, and downright curiosity, as owned by others. The office building was large and roomy; the colonel’s desk was close to the door; beyond it were tables spread with maps,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

magazines, and papers; a big stove stood in the middle, and a dozen chairs were scattered about, for it was here the officers met one evening each week in the one "book-schooling" to which they were then subjected—a recitation in regulations or "Tactics." Across the hall was a smaller office—the adjutant's—and beyond that the room where sat the sergeant-major and his clerks. The windows, snow-battered and frost-bitten, gave abundant light from the skies, but none on the surroundings—the view being limited to scratch-hole surveys. There was nothing to distract attention from what might be going on within, and all eyes were on the two burly captains who entered at 8.30, fur-capped, fur-gloved, in huge overcoats and arctics. The wind had begun, even earlier than usual, to whine and stir as it swept down from the bleak northwest, and the mercury had dropped some ten degrees since the previous evening.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

"Blizzard coming," said Scott, as he glanced at the sullen skies, and Scott knew the Rockies as he did the Paymaster's Manual.

"I report as old officer-of-the-day, sir," said Curbit, with brief salute, tendering the guard report book.

The colonel went straight to business, as he glanced over the list of prisoners.

"No sign of Trooper Rawdon?"

"No, sir. The patrol sent to search in town got back at reveille."

"His horse and kit all right?"

"All right, sir. Nothing missing that he was supposed to have."

"Police notified to watch all trains—and stages?"

"Yes, sir, and Sergeant Stowell, who commanded the paymaster's escort, remains in town with a couple of men to help."

There was impressive silence in the office. The colonel sat with troubled brow, looking grimly over the roster of

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the guard, the written "remarks" of the officer-of-the-day, and the hours of his inspections of sentries, etc. Barker, the adjutant, had dropped into a chair, a few feet back of the fur-capped officers, and, though listening as bidden, was gloomily contemplating the frost-covered panes of the nearest north window.

Eight men had gone with Sergeant Stowell as escort to the paymaster when, nearly four weeks earlier, he had set forth on his trip. Then the little iron safe was full of money. Seven men had come back with him, when, as the safe was well nigh empty, the paymaster said he hardly needed an escort. Of the eight who started, four were "casuals" who belonged to companies stationed at Fort Frayne, well up in the Indian country, and there they remained when the duty was over. Of the seven who came with Stowell, three belonged at Fort Frayne, a corporal and two men of Captain Raymond's troop, and they came fortified

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

with the orders of their post commander, a copy of which was now in Barker's hands.

"What I don't understand," said the colonel, whirling his chair to the right about and addressing the paymaster, "is how or why those men should be down here."

"It *seems* simple," answered Scott, placidly, he being entirely independent of the post commander. "From Frayne I had to go to the cantonments up along the Big Horn, and we doubled the size of the escort accordingly. When we got back there these three were permitted to come all the way, whether to buy Christmas things for the Frayne folk, or for affairs of their own, I did n't inquire."

"To whom did you assign them for rations and quarters?" demanded the colonel, of Barker.

"Captain Snaffle, sir—'C' Troop."

"Are they there?—the others, at least?"

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Corporal Watts and Trooper Ames are there, sir. Trooper Rawdon, as you know, is not. He has not been seen about the quarters since some time last evening. Moreover, the few personal belongings he had are gone.”

Again a pause. Then presently: “You arrested Kelly, I see, the man who was on Number Five.”

“Yes, sir. Both Doctor Schuchardt and the steward said his sickness was due to drink. The sergeant and corporal-of-the-guard are willing to swear he was perfectly sober when they stationed him. The men say he had n’t touched a drop of liquor for a month. He must have drunk after he was posted as sentry, for he vomited whiskey at the hospital. I believe he was doped.”

“That he could get whiskey anywhere along back of the officers’ quarters,” said the colonel, reflectively as well as reflecting, “is not improbable. That it should have been doped, judging from the way

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

one or two have misbehaved, is not impossible. Captain Snaffle's cook, it seems, was indulging some of her friends with a surreptitious supper, at his expense. That, very possibly, is how Kelley came to grief. The others seem to have hidden their tracks thus far." Then, as though with sudden resolution, he turned abruptly again.

"The usual orders, for the present, captain," said he, to the new incumbent. "And you are relieved, Captain Curbit"—to the old. "But I shall need to see you later, so do not leave the post."

"The man that leaves the post this day," said Major Scott, with a squint through the upper and unincumbered panes of the nearest window, "may need a seven days' leave."

"And that, colonel," said a quiet voice at the commander's elbow, "is what I applied for earlier. Pardon me, sir, but I need to know your decision, for I should now be going to town."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

It was Captain Sumter who spoke, and the colonel flushed promptly at sound of his voice.

"I had intended sending for you, Sumter," said he, "but these rather engrossing matters had to be taken up first. I—have your application," he continued, fumbling among the papers on his desk. "It is an awkward time—and these are awkward circumstances. It will leave your troop without an officer."

"Mr. Lanier will be here, colonel."

"Here—but in close arrest," frowned the colonel, "and you haven't had a first lieutenant since I have been in command."

"My misfortune, sir, but hardly my fault," answered Captain Sumter tersely yet respectfully. "General Sheridan selects his aides-de-camp where he will, and last month you thought it a compliment to the regiment and to my troop."

"You feel that—you *ought* to go?" asked the colonel, dropping the subject

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

like a hot brick, and resuming the previous question.

“Our guest, Miss Arnold, is in no condition to travel alone,” said Captain Sumter gravely. “My wife decides to accompany her, at least to Chicago, and I desire to go with my wife.”

The colonel bit his lip, and bowed. “I see,” said he. “Miss Arnold was very much shaken by what happened—after she got home?”

“Rather by what happened *before* she got home,” was the calm yet suggestive reply, and it stung the commander to the quick.

“Captain Sumter,” said he, flushing angrily, for no one of his officers held he in higher esteem, “your attitude is that of opposition, if not of rebuke, to the official acts of the post commander.”

“Then let me disclaim at once the faintest disrespect, Colonel Button, but—as Mr. Lanier’s troop commander and personal friend, I beg leave to say that so

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

far as I know, his offense is one which his comrades have committed time and again, without rebuke."

"Which simply goes to show, sir," responded the colonel, with glittering eyes, "that you do not know the twentieth part of his offense."

For a moment the silence in the office was painful. Men looked at each other without speaking. Sumter stood before his commander, turning paler with the fitting seconds. At last he spoke:

"If that be true, Colonel Button, of course I cannot think of going. I withdraw my application;" and, turning slowly, left the office.

Between him and the adjutant flashed one quick glance. There was something to come yet. The officers-of-the-day had gone—Curbit to shed furs and sabre at his quarters and say "Thank God!" Snaffle, his junior in rank but senior in years, a veteran of the old dragoons, to plod wearily back towards the guard-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

house for a conference with Lieutenant Crane, commander-of-the-guard.

In the office of the sergeant-major the clerks were busily at work consolidating the morning reports of the ten companies—six of cavalry, four of infantry—stationed at the post. A note on that of Captain Snaffle had already caught the eye of the sergeant-major, who had hustled in to impart the tidings to his immediate superior, the adjutant, and was disappointed to find them known already.

Instead of carrying three enlisted men present as “casually at post,” the “return” of Troop “C” had but two. Trooper Rawdon, whose horse, horse equipments, and field kit were safely stored in the troop-stables since noon the previous day, was himself accounted for nowhere. In view of the fact that he had not been seen, and could not be found, there was nothing remarkable about that. With the morning report book, however,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

self hand over hand along the picket fence, and turning his back to the gale every ten seconds to catch his breath, had he succeeded in returning to his post. Even stable duty was abandoned, so far as grooming was concerned, for though the men could readily be blown from barracks to their steeds, no power could fetch them back for supper. Veteran first sergeants told off a stout squad in each troop, and sent them with a sack-load of rations to reinforce the stable sergeant and grooms, there to stay to feed, guard, and water the horses. Unless the roofs blew away, and all were buried in drifts, there was safety, if not comfort, in the sheltered flats below the bluffs.

But the telegraph wires went with the first hour. The stage, of course, could n't be hoped to return from town, and, so far as getting news from the surrounding universe was concerned, Fort Cushing might as well have been in Nova Zembla. And the Sumters, three, with Miriam

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Arnold, had set forth at noon, intending to intercept the east-bound express, and the colonel's spirit was raging in sympathy with the storm, and in spite of his wife, for some one had started a tale that Sumter and his household had ostentatiously called upon Robert Ray Lanier, in close arrest, in utter disfavor and inferential disgrace.

Now, while an officer in arrest may not quit his quarters under seven days, and may not even thereafter visit his commanding officer unless ordered, or his brother officers unless authorized by that magnate, there is no regulation prohibiting other officers or their households visiting him. Nevertheless, they who publicly do so lay themselves liable to the imputation of sympathizing with the accused at the expense of the accuser, and some commanding officers are so sensitive that they look upon such demonstrations as utterly subversive of discipline, and aimed directly at them.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

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LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

And of such was Colonel Button, a brave soldier, a gentleman at heart, a kind, if crotchety, commander, and a lenient man rather than a disciplinarian. Much given, himself, to criticism of his own superiors or contemporaries, he could not abide it that he should lack the full and enthusiastic support, much less be made the object of the criticism, of his officers or men. A vain man, was Button, and dearly he loved the adulation of his comrades, high or low. Veteran Irish sergeants knew well how to reach the soft side of "The Old Man." Astute troop commanders, like Snaffle, saved themselves many a deserved wiggling by judicious use of blarney. Sterling, straightforward men like Major Stannard, like Sumter, Raymond, and Truscott, of his captains—men who could not fawn and would not flatter—were never Button's intimates. He admired them; he respected them; but down in his heart he did not like them, because they were, in a word, independent.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

And during the long and trying campaign that began early in June and closed only late in November, Button had made more than one error that set men to saying things, and at least one blunder that had called for rebuke. It was supposed at the time that the rebuke would end it, but, to Button's wrath, and indeed that of most of his friends, the story appeared in exaggerated form in many an Eastern paper. What made it worse was that, as told in Boston, Philadelphia, and other far Eastern communities, where the Indian is little known and much considered, Button's interests were bound to suffer, for he was declared to have butchered defenseless women and children in a surrendered village—a most unjust accusation in spite of the fact that certain squaws and boys had died fighting with their braves by night, when bullets could not well discriminate. Button had but just got his promotion to regimental command, and friends at court were working hard for his further advancement to

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the grade of brigadier-general—a fact that hurt him in an army so benighted as then was ours, in believing that generalships should be bestowed only upon the seniors and service-tried among the colonels. We have broadened much since then, and, as it was once said that every French soldier carried the baton of a marshal in his knapsack, so now may the silver star be hidden in the pocket of the lieutenants of every staff department as well as those of the Fighting Force. There are none who may not aspire.

So Button believed it of Sumter that he and his, on the way to the railway station, went in and condoled with Bob Lanier, and doubtless vituperated him, the commander, when in point of fact no one of their number had seen, or spoken with, Bob. Sumter merely left a big basket filled with fruit, and a little note with friendliness, from Mrs. Sumter, then sprang into the curtained escort wagon, and was whisked away.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Then came the storm, and then a Sunday and Monday in which no man went either way between the fort and town. And then a third, in which the gale went down, and the garrison first dug itself out, and then tunnelled in to the colonel's, the adjutant's office, and other submerged quarters, and on the morning of that third day Captain Sumter, in snow-covered furs, reported his return in person to his post commander, and explained that he had been storm-bound at the station in the meantime.

It was then barely nine o'clock. Guard mounting, the first held since Saturday, was just over. The morning reports, the first rendered since Saturday, were just in, and the staff and company officers for the first time since Saturday were beginning to gather at headquarters and to compare notes. All had much to tell. Stannard's wood-pile, Snaffle's storm-shed, and Barker's cow had blown away. Somebody had just reported Sumter's

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

north dormer window "torn out by the roots," which moved Button to say:

"I hope your quarters sustained no damage in your absence."

"I do not know, sir, I came direct to the office to report."

"Ah, true; your household started before the storm."

"Only started, sir. They went no farther than the surgeon's quarters, where we learned the train was six hours late. I had—business—in town, and went on. They remained."

"Then the ladies have not gone East?"

"Neither they nor any one else, since early Saturday morning. The road is blocked."

"The paymaster, too? He went in right after luncheon."

"I cannot say, sir. I neither saw nor heard of him about the station. It is crowded with people. Three trains are stalled there, unable to go either way, and now—with your permission, colonel——"

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Oh, certainly, certainly, Sumter. I did n’t wish to detain you. I hope you ’ll find the ladies well.” Whereat the captain withdrew, giving place to the quartermaster who had hurried in, an anxious look in his eyes. That he should have numerous losses and damages to report was to be expected; that he should appear in the least concerned was not. A faithful and loyal staff officer was Horton, but one of the most philosophic, if not phlegmatic, souls in the service. It took nothing short of a national disaster seriously to disturb his equanimity; therefore at sight of his face the colonel was almost instantly on his feet.

“Can I have a sergeant and twenty men at once, sir, armed and mounted? The ambulance with the paymaster never reached town.”

“Order them out at once, Mr. Barker,” was Button’s instant answer, turning to his adjutant, who went out like a shot. “What time did they start?”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“About two Saturday afternoon. It was blowing a gale then and the snow so thick we lost sight of them within a hundred yards. Major Scott declined an escort; said he and the clerk and the two men inside were more than enough. He had only three thousand dollars left and thought that too little to tempt anybody. Everybody knew he was just back from a long pay trip—not going—yet they have disappeared utterly. I had men ride the length of the creek valley ’twixt here and town, and there is n’t a sign of them.”

The silence in the office was oppressive. Men looked at each other in dumb consternation.

“How did you learn they had n’t reached town?” demanded Button.

“Sergeant Fitzroy just came out. He ’d been in there with Sergeant Stowell to help find Rawdon, he said. Major Scott had a section engaged in the Pullman for Omaha, and Fitzroy says he never claimed it—says he searched every stable

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

for the ambulance, but there was no sign of it, and he says there was a gang of half a dozen toughs that had been hanging about town for a week, and they 've cleared out. I 'd like to go and get into riding rig, sir."

"Go, and I 'll have a troop out after you if need be." Then turning to his adjutant: "Barker, have Sergeant Fitzroy sent for at once."

Another moment and a trig, well-groomed soldier, florid-faced, muscular, yet burly in build, stepped briskly in and "stood attention." His right eye and cheek were still heavily bruised and discolored. His nose was somewhat swollen. The colonel had looked upon him with sombre eyes the night of the dance. It annoyed him that a non-commissioned officer should have taken such a time and place to offer a complaint. He still disapproved. Moreover, he had given Sergeant Fitzroy no authority to go as volunteer aid to Sergeant Stowell.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“How did you happen to be in town, sergeant?” was the abrupt demand.

Fitzroy colored to the brows, but the answer was prompt:

“I understood the colonel to say ‘find him,’ referring to Trooper Rawdon, Friday night, and I went in Saturday morning thinking to help. Then we could n’t get back, sir.”

“My order was to the sergeant-of-the-guard, not to you,” interposed Button curtly. “Sergeant Stowell was sent and that was enough.”

“Sergeant Stowell was looking for a man in uniform, sir, and had never seen Rawdon except in trooper dress, and would never perhaps have known him.”

“Then how should you?” was the sharp query.

Fitzroy started. “I—had known him longer, sir, and much better. I—had occasion to reprimand him once or twice, and knew him and his—pals, if the colonel will pardon me—as none of the others knew

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

him. There was that young civilian, Lowndes, that went along with us and got into trouble, and—there were others. In fact, if the colonel will pardon me again, sir, I do not hold a high opinion of Trooper Rawdon, and if the colonel were to investigate, it's my belief he could trace many a disloyal trick—and tale—to that man. What's more," and now the speaker's tone betrayed undue and most unprofessional excitement, and it seemed as though he had quite forgotten himself and his official surroundings, for he finished with voice querulous and upraised, "if Paymaster Scott came to grief he has nobody to blame but his pet and himself——"

"No more of that, sir," broke in the colonel angrily, "unless you are ready to prove your words."

"Give me two days and half a chance, Colonel Button," was the confident answer, "and I'll do it."

V

As Captain Sumter said, the ladies had gone no further than the surgeon's quarters that memorable Saturday, and with Sumter's full consent they had not gone even that far. Friday afternoon he had wired his protest to the father of Miriam Arnold, and with startling emphasis the reply had come early Saturday morning: "I repeat that I desire my daughter to return at once." It angered this honest gentleman and soldier. The tone was abrupt, if telegrams can be said to have either tone or manner, but that "wire" settled the matter. Miriam said she must obey, and nothing short of Doctor Larabee, senior surgeon of the post, had prevailed against her decision. He himself had met the covered vehicle at his gate, and with calm but forceful courtesy had

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

insisted on their alighting. "Your train is half a day late," said he. "You 'll be wiser waiting here than at the frowsy station. Besides, I wish to see this young woman again." So saying, he fairly lifted Miss Arnold from the fur-robed depths of the dark interior, and deposited her on the wind-swept path. "Run in," said he, then similarly aided Mrs. and Miss Sumter. Their hand luggage and wraps came next, and Sumter drove away, saying he 'd be back to them in abundant time for the train—which he was, though not until Tuesday morning. It was Thursday before the road was open or the telegraph again at work.

Less than half an hour the trio spent under the doctor's hospitable roof. Before two o'clock the wind had increased to a gale. The snow was driving swift and hard. "I checked you just in time," said he. "There 'll be no train either way this night." And so by two o'clock, and just as the paymaster was driving away

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY.

down the front of officers' row, Mrs. and Miss Sumter, with Miss Arnold, escorted by the two medical officers, were struggling across the open space between the surgeon's houses and the rear fence of the long line, and presently entering the back gate at Sumter's.

It was an odd arrangement, somewhat peculiar to frontier stations of the day. The enclosure of Fort Cushing was diamond-shaped. The entrance gate was at the eastern apex. The hospital and surgeons' quarters stood on a line with this gate, their front perpendicular to the long axis of the diamond. Their "rear elevations," therefore, were not far from officers' row. From the front of Sumter's house, around by way of the main gate to the doctor's door—the first to the left (north) of the post traders's—was quite a walk. From back door to back door, however, it was less than two hundred paces. "We are near neighbors," Doctor Larabee had been saying, "though my wife

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

thinks it a long walk on a windy day. I could reach you day or night, almost in a minute. As for Schuchardt and Bob Lanier, they could talk to each other out of their back windows this morning, but you could n't hear a bugle across there now."

"Is he sitting up?" Mrs. Sumter inquired. "I thought, from what we heard, Doctor Schuchardt was trying to keep him in bed."

"He won't stay," was the brief answer. "I doubt if he slept a wink last night."

But Schuchardt was even less communicative. In answer to Mrs. Sumter's appeal, that young but gifted physician had looked perturbed, and finally answered: "Mr. Lanier's hurt is more mental than physical, therefore the more difficult for me to reach."

"You 've seen him this morning?"

"Twice, Mrs. Sumter, and I 'm going again as soon as we 've seen you home."

And the moment they reached the rear storm-door, and their fur-hooded, fur-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

mantled charges were safely within, Schuchardt excused himself, Miriam Arnold's eyes following with a mute message that he felt, if he did not hear.

But Larrabee lingered. Stamping and shaking off the snow, he followed into the warm and cozy army quarters. Cook and housemaid both looked astonished at the unexpected procession through the kitchen. Mrs. Captain Snaffle's "chef"—like her mistress, of Hibernian extraction—sprang up in some confusion from her chair and the cup of "tay" over which the three had been chatting, as is the way of our domestics at such times and places,—she had reason to know the mistress of the house did not well approve of her, or of these frequent visitations. "We shall probably dine at home," said Mrs. Sumter, somewhat coldly, to her own retainers, and bestowing no notice upon their visitor. "There may be no train till to-morrow;" and with that led the way to the parlor.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Almost immediately, without waiting for the coming of the attendants with their hand-bags, Miss Arnold fled upstairs, followed, at a glance from her mother, by Kate.

“You see how wretchedly nervous she continues,” said Mrs. Sumter. “How could we have let her go alone?”

“How should we let her go at all?” said Larrabee. “Indeed”—with a glance from the clouding window over the storm-swept parade—“I repeat, there will be no going anywhere for anybody just now. Has—has she—told you anything, as yet?”

Mrs. Sumter was gradually emerging from her winter coat of furs. For a moment she hesitated, then closed the door leading back to the dining-room and returned to him as he stood there, warming his hands at the great parlor stove then indispensable in our frontier homes. His fine, intellectual face, in its silver-gray fringe of crisp curling hair, was

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

full of sympathy and interest. It was a face to confide in, and all Fort Cushing swore by its senior surgeon. "Doctor," said she, calling him by the title he best loved, "Miriam says she believes it was all a mere delusion—a dream. She blames herself bitterly and—begs us to think no more of it—to forgive her, but——"

"But?" and the kind dark eyes studied the gentle, matronly face.

"But—oh, why should I attempt to conceal it? You know, and we have reason to know, she *did* see some one—some one right there in her room. Some one who went out like a thief, through the window, and down the roof to the shed, and away in spite of sentries or—or anybody—some one who was in there when they so unexpectedly got home. *You* saw——"

"Yes, I saw the tracks in the fresh snow on the roof. I could see them when I came hurrying over," murmured the doctor.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Captain Sumter had the snow swept off before reveille. What was the use of advertising it further? Mr. Barker and Mr. Blake saw it, too. They hold it was some garrison sneak-thief, looking for jewelry. Yet not so much as a ring, or a pin, was touched—only her desk.”

“Did *she* tell of that?”

“No, Kate was the first to see it. She flew up-stairs when she heard the scream; found Miriam a senseless heap on the floor, the desk open on the little table by the window, the contents scattered, the window up, and somebody bounding and slipping away in the moonlight. Then she heard the challenge and scuffle outside and thought the guard had him, and gave her whole attention to Miriam, until Mr. Barker shouted from the lower hall. Oh, yes, cook and Maggie both declare they were in their room, but—I believe they were next door at the Snaffles’. I believe the back door was left open for—whoever it was.”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“And nothing is missing?”

“Nothing. He was frightened off evidently. But Captain Sumter wished to have it all kept quiet until he could confer with the detectives in town. He has a theory of his own.”

She had lowered her voice, and now walked to the hall door, as though listening for sounds from aloft, whither Kate and Miriam had vanished.

“Miss Kate has a level head,” presently spoke Larrabee. “What does *she* say?”

“Doctor, that is what troubles me! Kate won’t say—anything. It’s the first time she ever kept a secret from me.” And now tears of genuine distress were welling in Mrs. Sumter’s eyes.

It was half after two, and the wind was shrieking through the open space back of the line, when Doctor Larrabee, bending almost double, managed to fight his way homeward. Schuchardt, occupant of the adjoining set to his own, had not

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

yet returned. At Sumter's gate the senior surgeon encountered the corporal-of-the-guard, nearly blind and well nigh exhausted. He had been sent round to relieve the men on post and bid them make the best of their way to the guard-room. He was even then searching for Number Five, who had most justifiably, in fact, involuntarily, taken refuge as previously explained. Had he not been blown into the Snaffles' kitchen, he might, like Barker's cow, have been blown away.

"You will probably find Doctor Schuchardt at Lieutenant Lanier's quarters," shouted Larrabee at the corporal, with kindly intent. "Take Number Five in there and get thawed out. Tell him I think a nip of whiskey advisable under the circumstances."

And thus it happened that two storm-beaten soldiers presently shoved their way through Lanier's back gate and banged at the kitchen door. Nobody answering, they presently entered, passed

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

through that deserted apartment, and, hearing voices further on, the corporal ventured into the dark hallway leading through the little frame house, now fairly quivering in the blast. Here he caught sight of two officers—big, powerful men, in fur caps and canvas overcoats, just pushing forth through the front door into the fierce blast without. One was Doctor Schuchardt, the other Lieutenant Ennis, joint occupant with Lanier of the tiny premises. As Corporal Cassidy later expressed it, he felt “like I ’d lost a bulging pot on an ace full.” He couldn’t run after and beg them to come back, yet he and his comrades were stiff from cold and almost breathless from exhaustion. Suddenly Number Five’s carbine slipped from his frozen glove and fell with a crash on the kitchen floor. The next instant the voice of Lieutenant Lanier was heard.

“Who the devil ’s that?”

“Corporal Cassidy, sir. The post sur-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

geon told me to bring Number Five in here and thaw him out. We 'd find Doctor Schuchardt. But the doctor 's just gone, sir, and——”

But by this time Mr. Lanier himself appeared in the hall, his feet in warm woollen slippers, his hands in bandages. “Well, I should say! Come right in here, you two. Pull off your gloves and get out of those caps and things. Man alive ”—this to Number Five—“why did n’t you come before? This is no time to stand on ceremony—or stay on post, either. My striker ’s stormbound somewhere. I ’d help you if I could, but I can’t. Help yourselves now, best you can; rub and kick all you want to; *dance* if it ’ll warm you.” And all the time he was crowding them up about a roaring stove, where presently he made them sit while he bustled about at a buffet in the adjoining room. “You ’ll have to help me, corporal,” presently he cried. “One hand can’t mix and pour and lift. There ’s

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

sugar; there 's hot water on the stove; there 's glasses and here 's whiskey. Mix it hot, and down with it! ”

And so hospitably and heartily, after the manner of old frontier days and men, the young officer administered to his humbler comrades; cheered, and warmed, and insisted on their eating with their second tumbler, and when in course of half an hour the two stood before him, glowing, grateful, and resuming their buffalo coats and fur caps and gloves, honest Cassidy tried to say his say:

“ ‘D’ Troop’s fellers never can brag enough about their lieutenant, sir, and though we don’t belong to ‘D’ Troop, it has n’t taken this to tell us why. If ever the time comes when me or Quinlan here can do the lieutenant a good turn he ’ll—he ’ll know it.”

After which they were gone, rejoicing in their new-found strength, yet reaching the nearest barracks only after severe struggle, and, later still, the crowded,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

suffocating guard-room,—where now some thirty men were huddled in a space intended for twenty at most—where Cassidy and Number Five were speedily telling to eager, appreciative ears their unusual and rejoiceful experience.

“Well, ain’t he the dandy lieutenant, though?” queried Casey, of “F” Troop. “And did he give you yer new cap, too, Quinlan? Sure the wan you marched on wid had the mange!”

Cassidy snatched it from his comrade’s head. “Mother av Moses! If he has n’t lifted the lieutenant’s——” But he broke off short. One glance he had given the band within. A sudden cloud swept over his face. There was an instant of indecision, then he whipped his own cap from his head and thrust it on Quinlan.

“I ’m a liar,” said he; “it ’s me own he ’s had.”

“Then you wear two sizes, Jim Cassidy, an’ both different.” Quinlan had pulled the headpiece down, and was star-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

ing in at the soft lining. "What 's this?" he began, when the corporal's fingers closed like a vise on his arm.

"Shut up, Quinlan. The whiskey 's gone to yer noddle. Come here!" And Cassidy led him, wondering, to the barred corridor without and slammed the door behind them. "Not a word do you whisper of this to any man, Pat Quinlan," said he, never relaxing his grasp. "You heard what that Cockney Fitzroy was swearin' to this morning? Sure—you 'd never say the word to back that whelp—an' harm the lieutenant!"

VI

“God helps those who help themselves,” quoth Lieutenant Blake, on hearing of the incident at Lanier’s quarters, “but God help those who help other fellows, unless ‘the Old Man’ likes it.” Blake was but a “casual” at Fort Cushing at the moment, summoned thither as a witness before a general court-martial then in session, but there was nothing casual in his friendship for Bob Lanier. Two years’ campaigning in Arizona and one in Wyoming had made these subalterns fast friends, despite the difference of ten years in their ages and nearly twenty “files” in rank, Blake being one of the senior and Lanier one of the junior lieutenants of the regiment. Blake was no pet of the post commander. Blake had a way of saying satirical things of seniors

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

whom he did not fancy, and Button was one of these. Blake should have returned to his proper station the day after the dance, but, like everybody else, so far as heard from, he had been held by the storm, and therefore happened to be in the club-room at the store along toward eleven o'clock on Tuesday, watching the distant deployment over the southeastward slopes of the barren upland. Fully half the mounted force of the garrison was on search for the paymaster's "outfit," and with Blake stood half a dozen infantry officers and two or three of the —th. To them, on his way to rejoin his searching troop, had entered big Jim Ennis, Lanier's chum and classmate, and Ennis looked the picture of smothered wrath. Half an hour previous he had been seen trotting up from stables to the adjutant's office, summoned thither by the orderly of the commanding officer. A few minutes later that same hard-worked orderly had been seen sprinting to the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

surgeon's quarters, and Doctor Larrabee, wrapped in furs and meditation, obeyed the summons, stood in the presence of an irate commander not more than fifty seconds, came forth wrapped in gloom, and took the short cut back of the major's house to his own bailiwick at the hospital.

About the only officer not to put in an appearance that morning out of doors, afoot, in saddle, or adrift in snow, was Lieutenant Lanier. About the first officer Button wished to see was Bob, and about the last was Blake. Yet such was the freakishness of Fate that the first man to hail him, with ill-time jocularities, was Blake, and the last of his officers whom he was destined that day to set eyes on was Bob Lanier, whom Schuchardt, in answer to the commander's summons, had earlier declared unfit to leave his quarters.

If it had not been for the startling announcement about the paymaster,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Colonel Button would have fought that matter out with the doctor then and there. First, however, he had to send forth his mounted men by scores in search of the missing officer and party. This done, he had once more summoned Schuchardt. Then he sent for Ennis, and had what they termed a "red hot row."

In his exasperated frame of mind, Button had been ready to believe almost any story at the expense of Lanier, and, such is the perversity of human nature, it added to rather than diminished his wrath that his revered senior surgeon should promptly corroborate the statements of both Schuchardt and Ennis, and further assume personal and entire responsibility for the episode of Saturday afternoon in Lanier's quarters. That episode had started many a tongue, and one of Button's henchmen, thinking to win favor at the fountain-head by mention of new iniquity on the part of the culprit, had deftly enlarged upon it. Snaffle,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

of course, was the fellow at fault, and he justified it on the plea that Lanier was demoralizing two men of his troop. The story he told was that Lanier had been carousing at his quarters with certain enlisted members of the guard. When told of it Button was furious, so much so that for the time he forgot about Sumter and the ladies of the Sumter household, and the north dormer window of Sumter's quarters, reported "stove in by the storm."

Nor had Sumter himself much time for domestic duties before the order came for him and his troop to turn out to aid in the search. He found the family fairly tranquil under the circumstances. He had sent a messenger galloping out from town, to assure his wife of his safety, when Tuesday's dawn showed the storm sufficiently abated. A devious course the rider took, for the road was blocked in a dozen places, and every ravine and hollow was packed to the brim with snow. But

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

he bore glad tidings and banished all anxiety on account of the husband and father. Their anxieties now were mainly for Miriam, their guest.

Mrs. Sumter had not half finished what she had to say concerning Miriam when the summons came that called the captain forth to join the searching squadron, but he had heard enough to increase the anxiety in his fine, soldierly face. He went up with Mrs. Sumter and looked critically over the damage to the window, in what had been Miriam's room. She had moved, per force, to the front—to Katherine's—room Saturday night, for toward sunset the storm-sash was torn out of the north dormer, and the window blew in with a crash. By dark the room was bank full of snow that Sergeant Kennedy and a brace of loyal troopers had been shovelling out since seven that Tuesday morning, without making any great addition to the huge drifts at the back. Front, flank, and rear, most of the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

houses along the line were packed solidly to the attic windows. On several the boys and girls were already coasting from the peak of the roof down over the back yards, sheds, and fences and out toward Larrabee's half-submerged hospital.

It was easy to see how and why the storm-sash had failed to withstand the buffeting. In his frantic haste and panicky flight the intruder of Friday night had wrenched a hinge from its fastening. The sash had sagged at the windward end, and the rest was easy for rude Boreas.

"That sash is probably somewhere down in the back yard, sergeant," Sumter quietly remarked to faithful Kennedy. "It 's under fifteen feet of snow, but when it comes to tunnelling, look after it, see that it is n't injured, and call me as soon as you find it."

Mrs. Sumter looked quickly at her lord. She well knew the reason of his instructions.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Did you show that scrap of lining?” she asked, a moment later, as they stood alone before the parlor fire.

“They have it,” was the answer. “I expect two of them out any moment.”

And then had come the sudden summons to turn out, and with only brief greeting to his daughter, and a hurried kiss and caress, Captain Sumter had mounted and spurred away.

It must have been after twelve, for orderly call and mess had sounded in front of the adjutant's office, when one of the hospital attendants came floundering up the row from Lanier's, and made his way to Sumter's door, a little note in his hand. He would wait, he said, for an answer, and the maid bade him step inside while she ran up-stairs. Mrs. Sumter answered her knock at the door of Miss Kate's room, into which the damsels were now doubled. To the disappointment of that somewhat volatile domestic, Mrs. Sumter closed the portal before pro-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

ceeding to open the missive, but her announcement, "From Mr. Lanier," caused Miriam Arnold to sit bolt upright.

DEAR MRS. SUMTER [it read]:

I've been living since Saturday mainly on your kindness and that delicious fruit. It was more than good of you to take such care of your incarcerated sub, and I'm ashamed to have sent no earlier thanks, but we've been banked in until this morning, and that rascal striker of ours is missing. He has n't been about the house since Friday night. Like Barker's cow, he may have blown away. I reckon they'll find him, her, and the paymaster's outfit snowed under somewhere down toward Nebraska, safe, but possibly starving. Schuchardt has gone with the command, so has Ennis, and I'm all alone with nothing to read. If you have anything moral, instructive, and guaranteed to soften the unrepentant sinner's heart—something I could read with profit as well as pleasure—*don't* sent it, but tell me how you all stood the storm and how you are. It is so hard to get anything but admonition out of "Shoe," and "Dad" is now more unreliable than ever.

I hope Miss Arnold is entirely recovered.

Yours most sincerely,

R. R. LANIER.

"The last thing a man mentions in a note is the first thing he wants an-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

swered," said Mrs. Sumter sagely. "What shall I tell him for you, Miriam?"

"Tell *me* what is to be done to *him*," was the sole reply, as the girl settled back dejectedly upon the pillows.

"I've tried to, child," answered her hostess kindly, patiently. "There is n't a court in the army that would sentence him to more than a brief confinement to limits, and reprimand." Yet Mrs. Sumter spoke with much less confidence than on Saturday. Had not her husband *had* to tell her his application for leave was withdrawn, and why? Had not Doctor Larrabee admitted to her that the colonel spoke of misdeeds far more serious for which Lanier must suffer? Was there not, indeed, a story in circulation, mainly in the Snaffle set, of a two-days escapade when the regiment camped near Frayne, and then a financial transaction in which Lanier had been involved—something growing out of an affair up on the Yellowstone—something including that young

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

civilian friend of his, the collegian turned cowboy—Mr. Watson Lowndes?

Even as she strove to assure Miss Arnold, for the twentieth time, that a military arrest was far more portentous in sound than in effect, something in Kate's determined silence and Miriam's insistence added to the effect of these rumors. Could it be that the boy had confided to the daughter, hitherto his stanch friend and ally, that which he dare not confide to her, his captain's wife? Could this account for the fact that, though it was impossible to conceal his love for Miriam, he never yet had owned it to her—to her to whom it was now obvious that the avowal would mean so much—so very much?

Then another thing weighed heavily upon the brave heart of this loving friend and mother. Never had she known her child to be so silent, so strange, as now. Ever since Friday night she seemed to avoid all mention of the affair, to shrink

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

from the subject—she who had ever been frankness itself—she who had never had a thought the mother did not share. She had become fitful and nervous. She seemed oppressed with some secret. In the long hours of their enforced confinement, with the lamps burning on the ground-floor by day as well as by night, Mrs. Sumter had pondered much over the result of her husband's investigations. Although Miriam's desk was open and its contents lay scattered on the table, nothing was missing, even to the packet of ten- and twenty-dollar "greenbacks" in its secret drawer. If robbery had been the object of the intruder, he had neglected his opportunity, or else been frightened off in time. If robbery was not his object, then what could it have been? The house was deserted at the moment of his entrance, that was now settled, for first the cook and then "Maggie" had owned to having run over to Mrs. Snaffle's kitchen for a moment, and the probability

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

was, they stayed the best part of the evening. The lights had been left turned low in the upper and lower halls, in the kitchen and the captain's den. Army doors were seldom locked or bolted. Any one could enter, front or rear. A marauder, if such he was in this instance, might have been there from tattoo at 9.30 until discovered some two hours later, and been there undisturbed.

But why should the situation so strangely affect her daughter? Could it be that she, too, cared for Bob Lanier? The thought for the moment made the mother's heart stand still.

She was writing her reply to his note, when Maggie again appeared. "Two gentlemen to see the captain, mum," and Mrs. Sumter hurriedly closed the note and went below-stairs to meet them. She knew well who they were and why they had come. A branch office of the Rocky Mountain Detective Agency had been maintained long months at the great and

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

growing railway station. They had been summoned by her husband, and that was enough.

Yet she shrank from meeting them, shrank from the thought of the questioning that must ensue. They might ask to speak with Kate, even with Miriam, but they did not. They asked to be shown the room, with the storm-battered dormer, by this time emptied of its load of snow. They asked to see Miriam's desk. Yes, the lock had been forced and by a big knife. They begged that Mrs. Sumter would not mention that to any one but the captain yet awhile. They were confident he would soon return. They smiled at the idea of the paymaster being held up and robbed in broad daylight by any gang in their neighborhood. They admitted that many questionable characters were in town—there always *were* toward the holidays, and just now, of course, the town was overcrowded—three big trains still stranded there.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

While they were yet at their work, there came sounds of stamping feet at the front door, and in came Sumter, stiff from cold, but brimful of energy.

“Found Scott and his clerk, at least,” he cried. “’Most dead and half frozen! The driver ’s gone, I fear. He was blown or pitched off. The mules ran away before the gale. Those inside the ambulance were helpless. Two dropped off behind and are lost. The thing finally capsized and went to pieces, and they managed to reach a little cattle shack, two miles south of town. They ’ve found Lanier’s striker, too—what ’s left of him.”

By this time Kate had come downstairs, and with pallid face was listening dumbly to her father’s words. She seemed hardly to heed the presence of the strangers. Not until the captain had emerged from his furs and stood robust and ruddy, yet a little short of breath, did she lay her hand upon his arm and ask her question.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Have they found Rawdon?”

“Rawdon? No, not a sign of him anywhere!”

“Is that the young fellow that those sergeants have been hunting for?” asked one of the detectives. “We managed to find out about him. He was in town early as three o’clock Friday, and he left on Number Six that night.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” said Sumter, gazing blankly at the speaker, “that he was n’t out here when—this—happened?”

“Not unless he had wings! That train leaves at 11.40.” Whereupon Kate Sumter slowly withdrew her hand, then turned away.

VII

ANOTHER day went by. Major Scott and his clerk, under Larrabee's skilful touch, were gradually regaining strength and beginning to answer questions. At first their senses seemed dulled, as though they could not shake off the frost that benumbed them. At first they could tell little of the cause of the mishap. The ambulance was curtained in, even at the rear, through which the two scared troopers had managed to slip to their doom. Not until the snows melted in the spring, and the contents of the ravines should be revealed, was it likely they would be heard of again. The railway was still blocked. The wires were still down. Fort Cushing stood isolated from the outer world, and no less than five of its garrison were absent and unaccounted for: the two men

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

detailed to drive in with the paymaster, two baceharalians who, being in town when the storm broke, had dared each other to face the gale and tramp out, and finally a young trooper namer Cary, who had arrived with the same recruit squad that brought them Rawdon, and had been on terms of friendship, if not indeed of intimacy, with him. They had been together that very Friday afternoon. In addition, whereabouts unknown, was Sergeant Fitzroy, of Snaffle's Troop. "Absent with leave," said the morning report. "Acting under the verbal instructions of the commanding officer," said his captain.

Along toward dusk on Tuesday, others of the searching squadron, sent afar down the valley, had come back, reporting that the ambulance mules were found, huddled together, half starved and still half harnessed, in a log shack or shelter to which their instinct had guided them after their heels had made chopsticks of the running gear. The ambulance body was snowed

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

under somewhere and nowhere in sight. The driver, a civilian employed in the Quartermaster's Department, had totally disappeared. Scott, the paymaster; Thomas, his clerk; and Rafferty, Lanier's soldier servant, or "striker" as then called, were still half dazed—Rafferty, indeed, so much dazed that no coherent words had yet escaped him.

One more unfortunate, the driver of Foster's sleigh, was in trouble. Not until two hours after the dance had he turned up with the missing equipage, a cock-and-bull story, and a case of what the corporal called "jag." He swore that, having got chilled through, waiting, he just thought to get one hot whiskey at the store. Sentry Number Six said he 'd mind the team while the driver went in, and the next thing he knew "they 'd run'd away, hell for leather," and he, their driver, had to follow two miles to Flint's Ranch, close to town, where he "might have taken a nip or two more." It was his first offense

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

and Foster forgave. It should be remarked, however, that Number Six declared that it was not he with whom the driver left the sleigh, but two "fellers," *i.e.*, troopers, who happened to be near the store. However, that did not seem much to matter at the time.

And Fort Cushing was in unhappy frame of mind. Colonel Button was in most inhospitable mood, and chafing because he could not communicate with the general commanding the department. Mrs. Button was confined to the house and denied to all but one or two intimates. Bob Lanier was still in close arrest. No man could say what might be the result, for Barker, the adjutant, declared he knew no more than they. "The Old Man had something up his sleeve"—several somethings—against him, but was confiding in no one, for he and Stannard were at odds over the matter; he and Sumter were practically estranged because of it, and for the first time in regimental his-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

tory Button seemed to be giving all his attention to Snaffle and men of his stamp and set. They were not more than three or four in number. They had been rather tolerated than sought in the past, but now the colonel seemed to have use for them alone.

And there was sorrow and estrangement at Sumter's. Never before, as Mrs. Sumter declared, had Katherine ever had a secret from her mother. Now there was a matter upon which it seemed she could not talk. Moreover, Miriam Arnold was affected in precisely the same way. She shrank from all mention of that mysterious affair of Friday night. Not only were they unable to speak of it to Mrs. Sumter; they avoided it among themselves.

It was now Wednesday, and there had been a procession of callers to inquire for Miss Arnold. The girls felt that they *must* dress and come down and face them. "Are you sure you feel equal to it,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Miriam?" was Mrs. Sumter's anxious question.

"I am sure I do *not*," was the weary answer, "but all the same I must."

And, being a girl of pluck, and much ashamed of the breakdown of Friday and Saturday, Miss Arnold made her effort, and did remarkably well so long as people refrained from prodding her about her "strange adventure," the alleged details of which, in exaggerated form, were garrison property by this time. There could be no doubt, said nine out of ten of the soldiery, it was the work of some sneak-thief in uniform, in all probability that young swell Rawdon, who was gone. But among a certain select few still another theory obtained, and Wednesday night when Sergeant Fitzroy returned to the post and asked to see the colonel, that officer, who was at dinner, sent answer that he would be at the office at eight o'clock, and further sent word to Captain Snaffle to be there at the same hour.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

A spell of sharp cold had followed the blizzard. The skies were dazzling at night with the radiance and sparkle of the stars. The young people of the garrison were out in force, rejoicing in the snow sports, the moonlight, the exhilarating air. The men had made some famous slides over at the bluffs, and the children along the officers' lines were playing hide and seek, about the drifts and tunnels at the northward end of the parade. They gathered in force about the office to cheer the colonel as he came forth from a long conference, which left him so absorbed he hardly noticed their gleeful salute. They pelted two prime favorites who followed, with drooping head and woebegone visage, and never once responded to the fun, and the youngsters asked one another what on earth could have happened to Cassidy and Quinlan, who were always so ready to frolic with them.

Then Captain Sumter had been sent for, and was admitted to a five-minute

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

talk with the colonel at his quarters, and came away with grave and troubled face, to a ten-minutes conference with his gentle wife that left her sorely worried and distressed.

“Ask Kate,” he said, as once more he set forth into the night. “I’ve got to tramp and think this over before I do anything further.” And at that moment Kate and Miriam had gone in to talk awhile with Mrs. Stannard. It was best they should not stay home, subject to incessant interview.

It was just about quarter of nine. The lights at the office were still burning, for the colonel had intimated that he might be back. Barker was bending over some of the post papers and reports at his desk, and wondering why on earth the colonel should be colloquing with Snaffle, Crane, Sergeant Fitzroy, and sending for Cassidy and Quinlan. That was a queer “outfit” of Snaffle’s at best. It seemed odd that the most pronounced “Brit-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

isher'' in barracks, outside of the band, should be a sergeant in the troop commanded by the nearest thing to an Irishman among the captains. True, Fitzroy as stable sergeant was quite independent, and, being very ambitious and zealous, had attracted the attention of other captains, to wit, Canker and Curbit, rival troop leaders, who each, at one time or other, had offered to make Fitzroy first sergeant if he would transfer; but Fitzroy preferred to stay where he was in "C," and it was easier to suggest than it was to assert the real reason.

Barker was busy with these reflections when the colonel once more entered and began pacing moodily up and down the room. The adjutant rose, but at a signal resumed his seat and waited. He was, as he whimsically described himself, "a relic of the previous administration." In those days officers might serve long years on the staff and never know an hour of company duty. Barker had been in the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

adjutant's office under three different regimental commanders, and, as etiquette required, had tendered his resignation to Button on that officer's promotion to the coloneley. Button as promptly and courteously replied that he hoped Lieutenant Barker would consent to serve as right-hand man until he reached his captaincy, which could not be very far off. But already Button was repenting. "Barker is too much wedded to the old order of things," said he. "Barker has his likes and dislikes" (a weakness the colonel denied to himself), "and Barker's a little inclined to imagine that nobody can run a regiment as Atherton did"—for which, at last, there was this much foundation, that Barker thought, if he did not say, that Atherton ran it much better than Button ever could hope to, and Button instinctively knew and infinitely resented it. It must be owned of Button that he hated the mere mention of his predecessor's name, methods, and opinions. It was

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

unlucky indeed, perhaps, that the views of one of the former colonels had been recorded in black and white as follows:

“In my opinion Lieutenant Lanier is one of the finest young officers in the Cavalry.”

Full fifteen minutes the colonel went striding up and down the long apartment used for office, assembly, and school-room. Once in a while he would turn across the hall and into Barker's smaller room, pause as though half minded to speak, then turn out again. Twice he went to the door, looking over across the glistening heaps and drifts, and letting in a lot of cold air. Twice he muttered something about its taking Snaffle and his sergeant an unusually long time to do a simple thing, and at last, as the trumpeters were heard, with much stamping of feet and blowing of hands, gathering for the old-time nightly “walk around” that preceded tattoo roll-call, Button abruptly turned on his adjutant and said:

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Barker, how long have you known Mr. Lanier?”

“Ever since he joined, sir.”

“And you knew him in his cadet days?”

“As an instructor knows a cadet, yes, sir.”

“And you told me you never heard of his writing to newspapers?”

“Never, sir,” answered Barker, rising from his chair and facing his commander. “And I repeat that I believe it impossible for him to have had anything to do with those—inflammatory articles about the campaign.”

“You consider him absolutely square—above a lie—or a trick of any kind?”

Barker faltered just one minute. What did the colonel mean by a trick? Mischief there had been, once or twice. Tricks had been played, and one only this last summer during the campaign—a trick, too, that if truth were told, Lanier should have known about. At least, it had been

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

played for his benefit, and had "pulled the wool" over the colonel's eyes.

"I consider him as square a man as I know, and utterly above a lie—of any kind," was the final answer.

"And yet you hesitate. You know, or have heard—rumors," said Button suspiciously.

"I have heard rumors and slanders, Colonel Button," was Barker's probably injudicious reply, for he closed with "and so many of them that I disbelieve nine out of ten."

"Well, here!" said Button impulsively, "here are you and Stannard and Sumter—three of the 'old liners,' as you are called in your respective grades—and I see plainly enough you three, and God knows how many more, are tacitly condemning my attitude toward Lanier. You think, if you don't say, that I have treated him with harshness and injustice—have listened solely to his accusers and enemies. Now, I've had enough of this!

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

There is nothing that *requires* a commander to show his hand to his subordinates, but as matters stand in this regiment—Oh, come in, Major Stannard. I sent for you purposely, and Sumter as well, to meet me here at tattoo.” (And at the moment, as the united force of field musicians began the stirring strains of the old cavalry “curfew call,” “The March of the Bear,” the two seniors solemnly entered the presence, removing their fur caps as they bowed to the commander.) “As I was saying to Barker, as matters stand in this regiment, some half a dozen at least of the men referred to as its ‘representative officers’ are apparently resentful of my arrest of Lieutenant Lanier, and attribute my course to pique, because he saw fit to show himself at the hop I declined to permit him as officer-of-the-guard to attend. You think, possibly, that because men like Captain Snaffle, Lieutenant Crane, and one or two of that set have been in consultation with me, the matters at issue are beneath your

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

notice.” (Here the three assailed officers exchanged glances, but said not a word in protest, for the colonel went impulsively on.) “They at least are loyal to their commander, and to the best interests of the regiment. Now I mean to show you. Mr. Barker,” said he impressively, “go to Lieutenant Lanier and say that I desire his presence here at once.”

And Barker took his cap and cape and departure without a word.

Down the line in the moonlight the snow heaps were sparkling as though crusted with brilliants. The black square of the field music was trudging out across an acre of the parade swept clean by the recent gale. The children, in laughing little groups, were returning from their hour at the slide, and here and there from the deep cut or tunnel in front of each officer's doorway dark muffled figures were emerging, and striding away toward the barracks—subalterns en route to the companies to supervise roll-call.

Just as Barker neared Stannard's, at

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the head of the row, two cloaked and hooded forms hurried forth, and Barker almost collided with them.

"Oh, good evening, Miss Kate! Good evening, Miss Arnold!" was his embarrassed greeting. Then, with attempt at jocularly for which he later could have kicked himself: "I 'm just in time to see you home, and head off hobgoblins and hoboos." No wonder the two walked the faster and gave but perfunctory replies.

"Indeed, I beg pardon," he blundered on. "I 'm just bound for Lanier's. Any message?"

"You might say we wish him speedy deliverance," answered Kate Sumter, with unlooked-for spirit and effect, for the adjutant, in dismay at his own awkwardness, darted swiftly ahead, shouting, "Hold on, Steve!" to an officer with whom he would rather not have wasted a moment's time.

Indeed, poor Barker was sore distressed. He could not help hearing

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

scraps of the talk that had passed at the office between the colonel, Snaffle, Crane, and certain summoned enlisted men, Fitzroy, Cassidy, and Quinlan among them. Even that poor devil who had been on duty Friday night as sentry on Number Five had been marched into the awful presence of the commanding officer, and ordered to tell who gave him the whiskey that had been his undoing—even promising immunity from punishment; but he was Irish and true to his faith and his friends, even they who had betrayed him, and he 'd die first, he said. Never would he “sphlit on the best feller in the foort.”

And Barker had heard many things that pointed to Lanier—so many that his heart seemed to stop as he entered the door, and sank at sight of the trouble in the face of the young soldier sitting there in conference with Ennis and Doctor Schuchardt.

Silently Lanier heard the summons. There was no reason why he should not

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

go, said the doctor. "The air will do you good," he added, "and we'll be here when you come back."

Five minutes sufficed to reset the bandages and get him into his furs. Ten minutes more and, for the first time since Friday evening, the accused officer stood in the presence of his colonel, with three tried and trusted comrades near to see him through.

"Mr. Lanier," said Button presently, "I have sent for you in deference to the sentiment in your behalf, entertained by officers of such standing in the army as these gentlemen who are here present. I am free to say that I have had grave reasons for forming a most unfavorable opinion of your conduct, even of your character. It has been my intention to forward charges of a serious nature against you, and to urge your trial by general court-martial. But such is my regard for these gentlemen, and the element they represent, that I stand ready

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

to abandon my views and adopt theirs on your simple word. Can I say more?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Lanier spoke: "It depends, sir, I think, upon what you wish me to answer."

Button colored. Turning to his desk, he took from an envelope several newspaper clippings. "You know what these are, doubtless, Mr. Lanier. Do you care to say what part you took in their preparation?"

"I am glad to say I took no part," was the answer.

"No part at all? And you do not even know the author?"

Lanier's dark eyes never swerved from their gaze. "I took no part, sir. I did not say—I do not wish to say—that I do not know the author," was the calm reply.

"Then you admit, or permit me to infer, that you know him—a member of this command, for no one else knew the facts—and, moreover, that you shield him?"

"I am shielding no man, Colonel But-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

ton. I would not shield a member of this command who wrote such wrong of it."

"Yet you know the author and you will not tell?"

"What little I know came in such a way that I *cannot* tell," was the resolute answer. Button's forehead furrowed deep and his voice trembled with anger.

"Enough said—or refused to be said—on that head. We will go to the next. Who personated you the night you left your troop at Laramie and went, contrary to orders, to that frolic at the post?"

A look of amaze came into the young officer's face. The answer came slowly, painfully:

"I took part in no frolic, sir. I went contrary to an order that had held good while we were out on the campaign, but that we did not suppose was binding there. I went to the post that night to help a fr—a man who—who needed money for an immediate journey. No one personated me to my knowledge."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“I have the written report of the officer-of-the-day, whom I ordered to inspect your tent, that you were there asleep at eleven P.M. Subsequently I learned that you were away from taps until nearly reveille.”

“You could have heard that from me, sir, and *why* I was gone, if need be,” And now it was plain that Mr. Lanier was growing angry. This was a point gained by the colonel. He tried for another.

“Officers who make comrades and intimates of enlisted men take chances that——”

“Colonel Button!” interposed Lanier, hotly, “I protest——”

“Protest you may, but listen you shall,” was the instant rejoinder. “It is well known you interfered with a non-commissioned officer in the proper discharge of his duty. That was last June, and it was in behalf of that young man Rawdon. It is well known that you were

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

hobnobbing with other enlisted men here, and gave them drink and food in your quarters on more than one occasion. It is well known you lent civilian clothing to your protégé for his latest escapade——”

“Colonel Button—gentlemen!” cried Lanier, “this is beyond all right!” Indeed, Stannard and Sumter were on their feet, in expostulation, but the colonel’s blood was up. Bang went his bell, and the orderly fairly jumped into the room.

“Call Sergeant Fitzroy,” said he, and in another moment Fitzroy stood before them, a civilian coat and waistcoat hanging on his arm.

“Briefly now, sergeant, where did you get those?” demanded Button.

“From the room that Trooper Rawdon occupied in town, sir. It’s the suit he wore about town last Friday;” and so saying, he held them forth. Lanier slowly took the coat, astonishment in his eyes; glanced at the tag inside the collar, bearing the name of his own New York tailor;

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

for a moment he searched it within and without, then handed it quietly back.

“It is enough like mine to deceive anybody but—the owner,” said he.

“Do you mean to tell me——” began Button indignantly.

“That this is not mine?” interposed Lanier. “Yes, sir, and that one very like it will be found in my closet at home.”

“Mr. Barker will go with you, and you will resume your confinement—in arrest;” and Button, in his anger, was lashing himself to language his hearers never forgot, and that some could hardly, even long months after, forgive. “In *my* time, as a young officer, nothing tempted one of our members to violate an arrest, but you——”

Pale as death Lanier faced him.

“Surely, sir, a cry for help—that I thought might mean fire——”

“There was *no* cry for help,” interrupted the colonel. “There was no sign of fire. Even if there had been, it should

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

mean nothing to a man of honor when ordered in arrest. That is the only creed of a gentleman.”

And then, with the lone trumpet of the musician of the guard wailing its good-night to the garrison—the sweet, solemn strain of “Taps”—the adjutant led his stunned and silent comrade home.

VIII

ENNIS and Schuchardt were still there, and started at sight of Lanier's white face. Without a word he led on to an inner room, where Ennis sprang to his side. "Help me off with these," he said, "and bring a lamp. Come up-stairs, Barker;" and, wondering, both the others followed. There were but two sleeping rooms aloft in the little bachelor set. Ennis had the one facing the parade. Lanier's looked out upon the hospital and surgeon's quarters at the back. Into this room marched Bob Lanier and threw open the door of the single closet wherein was hanging uniform and civilian garb in some profusion. Ennis held the lamp on high, and with his free hand Lanier began throwing out the contents—a new uniform dress coat, an older one that had

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

done duty for the three previous years, two sack coats or "blouses," the police officers' overcoat of the day, several pairs of blue trousers, with the broad stripe of the cavalry, and these as they came were flung on the bed by Barker and "Shoe." Then appeared a suit of evening clothes, carefully handled. Then a brown business suit of tweeds, then a light drab overcoat, and then the closet was well nigh empty, and Lanier faced them with the simple words: "It 's gone!"

"What 's gone?" demanded Ennis.

"Why, that dark gray mixture sack suit I brought from leave last year. It always hung 'way back in here."

"*Who* wants it now, I 'd like to know?" demanded Ennis.

"Our colonel, who accuses me of costuming Rawdon for his getaway." And the three friends looked at each in something like consternation.

Then Barker spoke: "It 's only fair to the colonel to tell the rest, Bob. Raw-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

don's box, that he left for safe keeping with a friend in town, had not only the suit you saw at the office, but a new fur cap with your name in it. There were other things that looked queer. The day of the storm Quinlan came over to the guard-house after his visit here, wearing a new cap instead of his old one, and Cassidy swooped on it, thinking it yours, for it was here he got it, and the name in that cap was Rawdon. It leaked out somehow. Fitzroy hunted the story down."

"The name was burnt out when Cassidy brought it back to me," said Lanier slowly. "He claimed that in lighting his pipe——"

"Poor Cassidy lied every way he could think of to save you," said Barker ruefully. "It 's the young cad you befriended and helped along that 's tricked you in the end, and you 're not the only man, I 'm afraid."

"Roped Rafferty in, I suppose," said Schuchardt, while a light of superior wis-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

dom stole slowly over the face of Lieutenant Ennis.

“Rafferty, doubtless, to the extent of bribing or wheedling him out of Bob’s new cits——”

“But those were *not* mine that Fitzroy had!” burst in Lanier.

“Of course not. He’s left you a worn suit in place of the new. Where’d he steal that one, I wonder? There isn’t another officer of your size and build at the post. But, here, I’ve got to go back and report, and my report will be in these words: ‘Mr. Lanier has been robbed, too,’ ” and Barker made for the stairs.

“One moment,” called Ennis. “You said Bob was n’t the only man this fellow had tricked. Do you mean——” he paused suggestively.

“I mean, yes—that there’s more than one man, and there’s at least one poor girl in the garrison to mourn that fellow’s loss, and be d—— to him!” and with that Barker was gone.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Button listened to his adjutant's report with something almost like a sneer. Stannard and Sumter heard it with grave faces, but without a word. Snaffle, who had drifted in, sniggered with obvious triumph.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel, "you have not heard the half of what I know, and every day brings something new. This comes in from Laramie to-day, brought with the mail that lay over at the Chugwater during the storm. Read that, Stannard." And Stannard took the paper and glanced over it, blinked his eyes, sniffed, and said: "I've heard about that case, and I'll take Lanier's story any day against—that fellow's affidavit."

"Major Stannard," said Button severely, "you are speaking contemptuously of your superior officer."

"Colonel Button," answered Stannard, with high held head, but with firm hand on his temper, "I am speaking contemptu-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

ously of my superior officer's *informant*, not of the commanding officer of Fort Laramie. If you care to look you will see that he quotes, not asserts, that 'this money was advanced to Mr. Lowndes on Mr. Lanier's statement that the young man was summoned home by the serious illness of his mother, and that he, Mr. Lanier, would be responsible for the transaction. Mr. Lowndes has never repaid it, and Mr. Lanier when appealed to four weeks since not only refused to make it good, but abused and cursed me for simply asking for what was my own.' Now, sir," concluded Stannard, "I haven't sought to learn the facts in the case, but I'll bet ten dollars to ten cents you have yet to hear them."

"Very good, gentlemen," answered Button, rising in obvious chagrin. "It is quite evident in your opinion Mr. Lanier is a persecuted saint and I am an abandoned sinner, but just as soon as I can reach Omaha this case shall be laid

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

before a general court-martial, and meanwhile I waste no more words defending my actions.”

Whereupon, with formal “Good-night, sir,” from Stannard and Sumter, and a grumpy dismissal from the indignant commander, the ill-starred conference broke up. Snaffle, pouring balm into Button’s ready ear, as he saw him home, went in and drank his health at the well-stocked sideboard, and then started straightway across the parade to his troop quarters, and, late as it was, called for his first sergeant.

The men were mostly in bed, as they should be at such an hour, but there had been an informal dance, and many of the sergeants were still at the hop room. Beyond this brightly lighted building, and about in the rear of the infantry barracks at the westward end, was the slide into the creek valley, whereat so many of the officers’ children had been coasting early in the evening, and where now—nearly

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

eleven o'clock—half a hundred young people of both sexes, wives and daughters of quartermaster's employees and of the elder sergeants, attended by their gallants from the garrison, were having a merry time of it. The moon shone in brilliance. The night air, frosty and still, was full of exhilaration. The officer-of-the-guard, merely cautioning the revellers to control their impulse to shout, had gone on his way with implied permission to keep up the fun, and presently other officers appeared upon the brow of the bluff, interested observers. One of them, the junior medical officer of the post, was known to all, for his duty it was to attend the families of the soldiery resident in the little village of their own, just west of the quartermaster's corral, and sheltered by the long line of bluffs from the northerly gale. Deep in snowdrifts lay the snug little cabins, cottages and shacks, wherein dwelt these blithe-hearted folk—many of the girls as pretty, and to the full as

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

coquettish, as their sisters of the official circle in the big "fort" enclosure above. Still farther to the west lay three little houses on the level "bench," by the swift-running stream—the homes of the corral-master, the wagon-master and the veterinarian—civilians all, as then ordained, yet men who had lived their lives with the army on the frontier.

And it was one of these, the veterinary surgeon, a gray-haired man of nearly sixty, who presently came toiling up the hillside, touched his fur cap front in salutation to tall Lieutenant Ennis, and begged leave to speak a moment with Doctor Schuchardt, whom he led slowly away.

Looking gravely after them and pondering many things in mind, Ennis, none the less, had attentive ear for the chatter and gossip of a neighboring group that had suspended their sledding for the moment and were curiously watching the pair.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“There ’s no more the matter wid Dora Mayhew than there is wid me, ’cept one,” said a red-cheeked maid of “laundress row,” to the eager group about her. “She ’s been daft about that young dude Rawdon ever since he came last spring to Frayne.”

“Yes, an’ deaf to Cockney Fitz,” laughed another.

And Ennis, turning quickly, noted the group, four young non-commissioned officers and three of the garrison girls, all of them toying with the name of good old Mayhew’s bonny daughter, she whom that veteran English horseman had taught and guarded with such jealous care, to the end that jealousy burned in the hearts of a dozen other girls less favored in face or fortune. Well had Ennis known of Sergeant Fitzroy’s aspirations. Few in the regiment had not, and few there were who did not know that, in spite of Mayhew’s avowed dislike for him, the girl had for a time encouraged. It may have been

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

only to pique the others, for Fitzroy was clever, well-to-do, a rising man in the service; indeed, one who had "money in the bank and men in his toils," said elder women in the quarters.

Then, in April, to Fort Frayne, had come this handsome young fellow Rawdon, with better looks, better manners, and even, as it seemed, better money, for Rawdon was lavish where Fitzroy was "near," and the favor of the young girl, who had toyed with the Englishman, turned from him to this unknown. Then the whole command went forth to war and to a summer of sharp work. Then with the late October, headquarters, band, and six troops had been transferred from Frayne to Cushing, close in to civilization. Then had come Fitzroy's new opportunity, with Rawdon left at Frayne. Then had come Rawdon himself; then the night of mystery; then the day of the storm, and when the skies above were clear again Rawdon was gone, no man knew whither,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

leaving a trail of suspicion, accusation, and a weeping, well-nigh desperate girl behind.

And in this web of intrigue and mystery Bob Lanier had become deeply, even dangerously, involved. Ennis was sorely worried. It was to see Mayhew the two friends had come, and, lo, Mayhew had met them on the way, himself in trouble and perplexity.

"Where did you say she was now?" Ennis heard the doctor ask, as they rejoined him.

"She went to speak with Mrs. Stanard, but said ladies were there, so she came back a while ago. I could hear her crying in her room before she went the second time;" and poor Mayhew's head was drooping.

"And you wish me to see her to-night?"

"If you 'd be so good, doctor. She 'll soon be home. I was going over in search of her now."

"Wait," said Ennis. "Listen!"

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

There was a flurry among the revellers a few rods away. Two men had run toward the corner of the nearest barrack, looming black against the northward sky. Others could be seen hurrying after them. Then, *could* it be? Yes, sharp and clear came the sound of a shot from away over toward the hospital. Another nearer; another still nearer, and distant shouts, and then the blare of the trumpet.

“Come on! It’s fire!” said Ennis, and sprang in pursuit of the leaders, “Shoe,” and Mayhew following. “It’s fire!” went up the cry along the hillside. “Fire!” echoed the nearest sentry, letting fly the load in his rifle. “Fire!” shouted the few wakeful fellows in barracks, tumbling instantly every man from his bunk to his boots and into his ready clothes. “Fire!” yelled the sergeant-of-the-guard, as he tore in among his sleeping comrades. “Fire!” echoed the cry from barrack to barrack, as the men poured forth into the night, and then, as

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Ennis rounded the corner and came in full view of the wide open parade with the long line of quarters beyond, his heart leaped for his throat in wild dismay. "My God, lieutenant, it's *your* house!" panted a racing trooper. "My God, and Bob's all alone!" sobbed Ennis, as he sped through the snow, for already from the front dormer and from the lower windows the flames were mounting high in the trail of a black volume of smoke, and over the crackle and roar of the fire, the rush and clamor of men, the thrilling alarum of echoing bugle and trumpet, there rose on the night air the scream of a girl, imploring instant aid, and this time at least there could be no doubt, for the cry was, "Save him! Save him!"

Of the minutes that followed no man could give collected account. All Ennis saw as he came staggering round to the rear of the flaming furnace that once was a house, was a wild-eyed girl being led away by a group of sympathetic women,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

and a little group of men bundling a slender yet vigorously protesting form in a snow drift, where one or two others were being rolled and buffeted; while others still, with a keening Irishman in their grasp, were lugging him back to hospital; while Corporal Cassidy, with his hair singed close to his head, his face and hands seared and his clothing soaked, smoking, and a general wreck, was striving to evade his handlers and stand attention to the colonel, who for his part was bending over Bob Lanier just emerging from his third involuntary plunge in the drifts, and sputtering objurgations on his would-be benefactors.

“In God’s name, Lanier,” almost wailed the colonel, as at last that young gentleman, likewise singed and scorched and soaked and dripping, yet preternaturally cool for one just out of a blazing hell, found his feet and faced his commander—“in God’s name, why didn’t

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

you jump when they told you? There was nothing but snowdrifts below——”

“There was a colonel coming,” said Bob, with a grin of mingled anguish and satisfaction, “who held *that* sort of thing to be breach of arrest.”

IX

FEW men slept the rest of the night for talking over the stirring scenes of that spectacular fire. Indeed, there had been a strenuous fight to keep it from spreading, and the Graysons' quarters next door were badly scorched, and the Graysons woefully scared, before the little bachelor hall had burned itself out. Big Jim Ennis had lost pretty much everything he owned except what he had on. Lanier was not much better off. As to the origin of the fire, Bob merely said that he had turned the lights low in the sitting-room, and, obedient to "Shoe's" orders, had gone up to his roost, too wrathful and amazed over what had occurred even to think of sleep—to think, in fact, of anything but the colonel's words. So absorbed was he, as he slowly undressed, he never noted

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the sounds from below until his room of a sudden seemed filled with smoke, and, throwing open the door, he was amazed to find the hallway ablaze, the stairs impassable. Running to his dormer window, he yelled fire at the top of his voice. Sentry Number Five heard and came running down along the back fence; saw the peril, let drive a shot and gave the yell that roused every one at the hospital—poor Rafferty, half crazed, half dazed, and by no means half dressed, coming leaping along among the first.

And there at his back window, choking with smoke and tossing out clothing and other belongings, stood Mr. Lanier. Some men went searching for ladders up the line of back yards, the post hook and ladder truck being, of course, on the far side of the garrison. There being no extension and sheds to this little box, as to the larger quarters up the line, other men began shouting, and Lieutenant Grayson imploring Mr. Lanier to jump,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

for already the flames had burst through the windows below. Then came the episode the regiment laughed over, swore over, talked over, many a long year thereafter. To Grayson's appeal Bob's only answer was a calm and deliberate:

"Give my compliments to the colonel, will you, and tell him that, my quarters being all abaze, I 'd like an extension of arrest?"

Then Sumter and Stannard came in, tumultuous, and *ordered* him down, and Blake and Curbit, and the rest of the card party, came tearing after them, and berated him for an absurdity, and implored him not to be an ass. And then a bright tongue of flame licked in through the transom behind him, and the door panels burst from the heat, and all the room at his back suddenly blazed with fire, and then went up the cry from that agonized girl, at sound of which Lanier started and strove to climb to the little window-sill, with a lurid sheet lapping down about

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

his head, and then a brace of young Irishmen, Cassidy foremost, came scrambling up a human pyramid, smoking and singeing below them. They reached the blazing eaves and burst through the fringe of flame, dragging Bob forth and on to the edge, and then tottered all together into that blessed mound of snow beneath, fast melting in the glare of that fiery furnace.

Then came the commander, and the swift running soldiers, and all the antiquated fire apparatus, and most of the families. Soon the hooks were locked in the blazing framework, and speedily the little bachelor den was torn into hissing and smoking fragments. Meantime Lanier and Cassidy, Blake, Horton, and nearly a dozen daring fellows who had risked their skins to save their lieutenant, had been led over to hospital to be cooled off and lotioned and bandaged and variously put to bed, and when at last not a spark could be found in the black, un-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

sightly ruins, and even they had been buried under bushels of snow, the colonel and his men-at-arms went back to quarters, and many of the officers to the store, to talk it all over, especially what Bobby had said to Button.

And thus were we brought to the morning of Thursday, the sixth since the eventful night when Miriam Arnold's shriek had alarmed the garrison—Miriam, whose voice had now been heard a second time, upraised in frantic dread and appeal, but this time for the young soldier who, on the previous Friday night, forgetful of his arrest, had rushed forth at her cry, but this night had to be dragged—Miriam who now lay sick from maidenly shame that in one wild appeal to save her lover she had so betrayed herself.

With Thursday noon came resumption of telegraphic communication, and the long-stalled railway trains from east and west. With Thursday afternoon came "wires" from Arnold, the father, begging

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

to know had his daughter started, and back went the electric message that she neither had nor could, nor would for a week—"full details by post." With Thursday evening came stacks of belated letters, "with whole bales of newspapers," said the stage driver, to follow, and with Thursday midnight, long after every one had gone to bed, there came a tapping at Major Stannard's storm door, and presently a fumbling at the bell knob, a clanging of the bell.

"What now?" thought the sleepy major, as he scuttled down-stairs in slippers and dressing-gown. "Who's there?" he growled, as he unbolted the door. That fire down the line had made people nervous. There was no saying how it started.

"It is Mayhew, sir, said a solemn voice. "I've come not hoping, only praying, I may find my daughter here."

"Good God!" said Stannard. "Come in," and led forthwith his aged and trem-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

bling comrade within doors, seated him by the still glowing stove in the front room, and struck a light. In less than a minute Mrs. Stannard, too, had joined them, her kind blue eyes filled with tender pity and sorrow. She, at least, was not entirely unprepared. Poor motherless Dora had no lack of friendly counsel and fond, womanly sympathy when once she could be brought to lay her burden there. If only she had earlier sought that wise and winsome monitor! But Mrs. Stannard had not been at Frayne in the early summer, not until the major was assigned to station at Cushing had the good wife joined him, and meanwhile there had been no hand to guide, only a fond and passionate young heart. And now, with his gray hairs bowed in sorrow to the dust, poor Mayhew had come to tell his piteous tale. Ever since young Rawdon had gone with the paymaster she had been fitful and nervous. Ever since their coming to Cushing, four weeks ago, she had been

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

watching, waiting, listening, often weeping, and when letters came for her, with the postmark of Fetterman or Laramie, Red Cloud or the cantonment in the Hills, he could not but note her feverish eagerness and her instant escape to her own room to read her treasure alone. Oh, yes, he knew they must be from Rawdon. He had liked the lad, knew there was good stuff in him, and he could not bear that fellow Fitzroy, who was a military loan shark, a man who fattened on the needs or weaknesses of his comrades. He hated to think of his bonny girl's losing her heart to Fitzroy. He owned he rather welcomed Rawdon's advances and rejoiced that she, too, seemed to prefer him.

But—God! He had never looked for—this! Oh, where had she gone?—and why? He had found her at home and in tears after the fire. All morning long she had been in an agony of nervousness. Then that afternoon, some time, somehow, she got a message or letter, and then,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

kissing him and saying she would be better in bed, had gone to her room, but not to sleep. At eleven o'clock old Chloe's sobbing aroused him. He found it all deserted. Dora had disappeared, leaving not one word to comfort him.

They lost no time, those men of the field and the frontier. Stannard was dressed and out in twenty minutes; had summoned Ennis, Field, and others among the young officers; had routed out half a troop and could have had the entire garrison, for few were the soldiers who would not search all night or work all day for good old Mayhew and his pretty daughter. Perhaps that was one reason why, until this night, so many maids and mothers among the sergeants' families envied and slandered her. Mayhew had been far from wise, and Dora, indeed, had none to guide. Kindly and cordially treated as he and she had been by the officers and their wives—being, in fact, superior socially to the Snaffle household,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

if not to certain others—there was yet this bar to hold them back: they dined and danced not with the “commissioned” element of the post whereat Mayhew was stationed. They were of finer clay than the people of the rank and file, and so, with the families of the forage and wagon-master, the chief packer and old Ordnance Sergeant Shell, they made up a little middle class of their own, when Dora’s heart had gone out, ungrudgingly, to handsome, clever, educated George Rawdon, whom all men could see had been reared among gentlefolk, and who, as further fascination, was supplied from some unknown source with money which he spent with lavish hand.

The moon was in the fourth quarter now, yet still bright enough to aid them, and up and down the creek bank went the searchers, probing every pool, searching every shallow. It was odd—or was it odd?—that for half an hour no man, no matter what he thought, went down and

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

banged at the door of "C" Troop's stable—where in cozy quarters and solemn state, guarded by the sentries on either flank, slept that surly magnate among the non-commissioned officers—Fitzroy, the stable sergeant of Snaffle's troop. Whatever had befallen poor Dora Mayhew, it was not to join Cockney Fitzroy she had fled.

Had she fled to join anybody? was the question that racked so many a heart, for, with the possible exception of gentle Mrs. Stannard, the girl had made no confidant. It was stanch old Chloe who would have it that her pet and pride from childhood, her solemn charge since the poor mother's death eight years before, had never left her father's roof to do harm to herself and break their hearts. If morning came without her, she surely had been lured away, and, if "Marss Rawdon" had really gone, who was there who, through love or fear or threat or artifice of any kind, *could* lure her?

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

It was this, full fifteen minutes after Lieutenant Field and two of his men had trotted off to town, that started old Stannard and big Jim Ennis down the valley from the veterinarian's, through "Sudstown," where girls and women were huddling and whispering at the news; through the hay and wood-yards, where the sentry challenged sharply, so often had he halted searching parties in the last ten minutes; past the little shack where dwelt the farriers and blacksmiths, many of them alight, for the story had gone sweeping; and so at last they came to the long cavalry stables, standing gable ends to the north, like so many companies in close column, and at the sixth of these, farthest from the bluff whereon stood the barracks and quarters, they stopped and banged at the door. No answer—even when the sentry came to their aid and hammered with the butt of his carbine. They went round and rattled at the window of the sergeant's room. Still no

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

response, and at their beck the sentry yelled for the corporal-of-the-guard, who had followed down, expectant.

“I ’ll have him out,” said he, and ran round to the south end, and presently came back, panting but triumphant. He had roused the two stable orderlies. They would open up in a minute. They did, with much blinking of eyes and some demur, but stood abashed when the burly major strode in, big Jim Ennis at his heels. The latter hesitated not one second. His weight went in with the battering ram of that muscular leg and massive foot, and the sergeant’s door flew open before them. The room was empty. Fitzroy and Fitzroy’s furs were gone. Nor was that all. Snatching a stable lantern from the hand of one of the shaking grooms, Ennis swung it high aloft. Two empty stalls stood close at hand.

“I thought so,” said he, then grabbed the nearest orderly by the coat collar. “Who took Lieutenant Foster’s sleigh

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

and team," demanded he, "and how long ago?"

"Sergeant Fitzroy, sir," came the answer, with a doleful whine, "just before the third relief, at half-past eleven."

"No time to see the colonel now!" said Ennis. "Major Stannard, I've got to gallop into town, but a dozen men, if need be, should trail that sleigh."

"Go it, boy," was the instant answer, "and I'm behind you."

X

ON the principle that disaster ever demands its victim, the sentry of the second relief—the immediate predecessor of the soldier now on post at the north line of the stables—was stirred up at once and ordered to explain. Even as Stannard was hastening the movements of the men detailed to mount and trail the Foster team, even as Ennis was galloping townward on a mission of his own, Captain Langley, of the Infantry, officer-of-the-day, began his stern examination of the luckless guardian.

Orders are orders. Even a stable sergeant could not take or send an animal out at night (except the building stood in danger of destruction by flood, fire, or tornado) save on written order of a commissioned officer and in presence of the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

corporal-of-the-guard, and Stoner, the sentry of the second relief, admitted he knew these were the orders, but "the fellers" had never supposed they applied to Sergeant Fitzroy, who did pretty much as he pleased. In fact, Fitzroy hitched up and drove away without so much as a word to him. He, the sentry, was too little surprised to think of ordering "Halt." Even as Langley drew from him the admission, the word came up that the squad had started hot foot on the trail. It led straight away to town.

And the stable orderlies had sworn that Fitzroy started alone. Therefore, unless Dora Mayhew had circled the fort and joined him on the bleak eastward prairie, it was most unlikely she had gone with him, and, up to one o'clock, there was none to hint with whom, or how, except afoot, she could have gone. Then, however, came revelation. The sentry stationed at the northwest face of the post admitted having seen "a rig from town"

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

making wide circuit clear around behind the fort on the westward "bench," which was swept almost clean of snow. It had kept well out beyond hailing distance, stood a moment or two up at the edge of the bluff, then whirled about and went the way it came. What hour was this? Just before they called off eleven o'clock. Why had he not mentioned or reported it? Well, he thought it might have been some of the officers. "They sometimes came out late and went in home the back way," whereat, in some confusion, Captain Langley dropped that phase of the investigation.

By two o'clock that rig also had been trailed back to town, where it was lost in the tangle of wheel tracks. There Ennis and Field and several troopers, with one or two interested citizens, were in quest of tidings. There they were joined by Mayhew himself, who had one more hope. Dora had a friend, a few years older than herself, with whom she had been intimate

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

at Fort Riley. They went daily to school together when children, and wept when parted. Now her friend was married to a conductor of the Union Pacific Railway, and living in town. It might be that Dora had gone to her.

They found the house, and hammered at the door and lower windows, and succeeded only in waking a Chinese servant who said, "All gone; b'long Omaha," and refused further information. They went to the three stables in town, and all had "rigs" out, some of them two or three. None, to the proprietor's knowledge, had been to the fort. Most of them had gone to a dance at Arena, a cattle town six miles east, and it was high time they were returning, for now it was after three. "What's all the row about anyhow?" demanded the night watchman of one of these establishments. "There was that cockney sergeant fellow here along about midnight, asking questions and raising hell. The town marshal had a rumpus

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

with him and went to bed mad.” The half-dozen hangers-on about the railway station, and the roisterers at the one, open-all-night saloon were growing inquisitive, if not impudent. The station-master had gone home, but the lone operator to whom, one after another, Field, Ennis, and Mayhew had appealed, declared that no young lady had gone on Number Six, for the reason that Number Six had n’t gone and would n’t go till ’long toward daylight. She broke down somewhere about seven o’clock at Medicine Bow.

But Ennis and Mayhew came at him a second time, with a second question: Could he tell them anything of Mr. and Mrs. Osborn, Osborn being a conductor and Mrs. Osborn Dora’s friend of whom previous mention is made? Had they gone to Omaha? No, for Mr. Osborn was round here early in the evening, and had to be here at six o’clock A.M. to meet and take Number Five over the Mountain

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Division. Then John Chinaman had lied, said poor Mayhew, grieving sore and quite ready to break down, but Ennis was spurred to new energy.

“Keep your heart, old man,” said he. “The more I think of this, the more I ’m sure there ’s light ahead, and I ’m going after it. Go to the hotel, lie down, and leave the rest to me.”

And still Jim Ennis felt by no means confident he could be in time. He knew the Mayhews only slightly. He had never before been stationed at regimental headquarters, had seen and known Dora only since their coming to Fort Cushing, and therefore had not learned to share Bob’s honest admiration for her. She might be all Bob thought her, a loving child and a true-hearted girl in spite of her infatuation for this presentable young trooper whose antecedents nobody knew. Ennis had often marked him during the campaign and noted his regard for Bob, and felt kindly disposed toward him until mid

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

September, when two troops were sent in to Frayne, with the pack train and orders to load up with rations and escort it back. Rawdon was missing from the column when it camped the first night out, on the return, and only caught them by a daring night ride through the Sioux country when they were two days' march beyond. His captain, Raymond, had sternly rebuked him and promised him further punishment when they reached the regiment, but Lanier had heard of it and interceded, thereby making Rawdon still more his friend. But now the heart of "Dad" Ennis was hot against him, for fear that what Barker said might all be true: that Rawdon had wrecked an old man's heart and home, and ruined an old man's beloved daughter.

With just two troopers at his back, toward four in the morning, big Jim went spurring on through the dim moonlight, town and station far behind, following a meandering sleigh and wagon track

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

across the wide, dreary upland, riding, as a rule, parallel with the railway, while such sleighs as tried the journey had evidently been making many a detour. Snow there was in abundance in the coulées and ravines, snow in sheets in the lee of every little ridge or hummock, but elsewhere the icy sod was swept hard and clean, and the sharp hoofs rang as though they struck macadam. Three miles out two "rigs" were passed, westward bound, filled with town folk who had been to Arena for the dance. Had they seen or heard aught of Mr. and Mrs. Osborn? he asked. No, they knew them well by sight, and would be sure to note them had they come to the dance. Five miles out a stage was encountered, loaded with exuberant revellers who had remained after the dance for a spree, and were now consumed with wrath because certain officers of the law from their own town, too, had hustled them out.

"A hull sleighful of 'em—three or four

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

anyhow—came over there with that cockney sergeant you fellers keep at the fort, lookin' for deserters. You after deserters? Well, here 's—hic—hopin' you don't get 'em."

It was all Jim Ennis wanted to know. "Come on, men," he cried, and spurred ahead, his wondering troopers following.

"Now, what the mischief is that man Fitzroy's game?" thought Ennis, as he pushed on through the bitter cold of the December morning. It had not been difficult to learn that the sergeant, after much search and inquiry in town, had started for Arena, taking with him, as it happened, two of the Rocky Mountain police, who had business there and were tired of waiting for the train. Ennis reasoned it was after Dora that Fitzroy had gone; that in his jealous misery he had kept watch upon her, had followed to town on hearing of her flight, had followed further, and this it was that gave Ennis

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the hope that she was accompanied by such worthy people as the Osborns. If that were so, it could mean but one thing. It was to join Rawdon, perhaps to be joined to Rawdon. Osborn had sent two messages by wire and received two early in the evening; Ennis had learned this through the operator, though the contents were withheld. Rawdon, probably, dared not come to Cushing City. There he might still be arrested on sight. Yes. Ennis had it now. Dora Mayhew had fled to Arena to meet and marry George Rawdon; Fitzroy had followed fast in hopes of blocking it.

And just as the twinkling switch-lights of the little prairie station hove in sight ahead, there came a sound that startled him—the whistle of a railway engine not a mile behind—Number Six at last, and coming full tilt—the very train, perhaps, that they, the young couple, hoped and meant to take, and might have taken on their eastward way had not Fitzroy, keen-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

eyed, quick-witted, and vengeful, been there in time to bar the move.

And then in the soldier soul of big Jim Ennis was born a strange, sudden, and somewhat unprofessional spirit of opposition. Starting out in the hope of finding and restoring to her father's roof the sorrowing fugitive, Jim Ennis veered right round to the purpose of succoring a maiden in distress. If marriage was Rawdon's motive in bidding her join him, then Rawdon was honest after all, and who was he or who was Fitzroy to stand in the way and stop it? No, by all the Arts of Peace and the Articles of War, Rawdon was right and d—— be the man that sought to check him.

Five minutes later, with the big engine and train coming hissing and grinding to a stop at the platform, Ennis sprang from his panting horse, tossed the reins to one trooper, and, followed by the other, shouldered his way through a little knot of staring townsfolk and up to a group at

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the edge of the platform. A trim-built young fellow in civilian dress was struggling in the grasp of two detectives; a terrified girl was clinging to his arm, tears streaming down her face; a clerical-looking, elderly stranger was expostulating; a man in the cap and dress of a railway conductor was vehemently arguing with a stocky sergeant of cavalry, who seemed master of the situation, and greatly enjoying his own importance. A pale-faced young woman, whom the conductor of Number Six addressed as Mrs. Osborn, was imploring his aid, when, to the amaze of the sergeant, this big subaltern in boots and spurs bulged in between him and Conductor Osborn and demanded to know the nature of the trouble.

"I 've run down this man, at last, sir," gulped Fitzroy, flustered, but making valiant effort at control, "as you see, sir, only in the nick of time."

"Oh, Mr. Ennis," cried Dora, throwing

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

herself upon him and clasping his arm, "Rawdon has done no wrong. We are married. Here are our friends to prove it. *Why* should they arrest him?"

"Colonel's orders, lieutenant. Arrest him wherever found," said Fitz stoutly, "and I 've a sl—stage here to take him back."

"On charges of your own invention, Sergeant Fitzroy," said Ennis icily, "no one of which you 'll ever prove. Have you any warrant for this man?"—this to the detectives.

"None, sir. The sergeant said he was a deserter, running off with the doctor's daughter."

"He 's no deserter. He 's on furlough by order of General Crook, travelling, I take it, with his own wife, and unless you want to burn your fingers to the bone, let go."

"Then lieutenant," burst in Fitzroy, "he 's a prisoner by order of Colonel Button——"

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Then as senior officer on the spot I ’ll take charge of him; also, Sergeant Fitzroy, of you, and the sleigh you feloniously made way with. Stand aside, sir. Now, gentlemen, how about this train?”

“Ordered right on, lieutenant, to meet Number Five at Beaver Switch.”

“Then it ’s a case of all aboard for those bound eastward. We ’ll hear the rest when you return from furlough, Rawdon”—for now the young man was trying to speak instead of seeking to speed away. “I did my best to be in time for the ceremony, Mrs. Rawdon,” continued Ennis, gallant and impressive, as he swung her suddenly aboard, “but with my usual luck I lost the chance to kiss the bride.”

For answer she quickly turned, flung her arms about his neck, and her warm lips swept his cheek. “One for you, Mr. Ennis,” she cried, and then again, “and this—for Mr. Lanier!”

XI

FRIDAY again, and late in the day, and Bob Lanier's arrest lacked but a few hours of its first full week, and Bob was in bandages and bed in a sunny room of the hospital. Ennis, after a long night in saddle and a short "spat" with the colonel, was taking a much needed nap. Stannard and his wife had gone down to Doctor Mayhew's to meet Mrs. Osborn, who had come to spend the afternoon. Paymaster Scott was up and about, and, in his independent way, had been saying unrelishable things to Button, who was in most peppery frame of mind. A wire had come from department headquarters to say an inspector would follow. "Instead of ordering a general court to try Lieutenant Lanier, they have ordered a colonel out to try me, by gad!" said But-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

ton. "For that's just what it all amounts to."

And of all colonels to investigate matters at Cushing, there was n't one in the army Button would not rather have had than the very one who was coming—bluff, blunt, rasping old Riggs, best known to fame and Fort Cushing, as "Black Bill."

"Why," said Button, to Scott, "this sending one field officer of cavalry to sit in judgment on the official deeds of another is nothing short of—of infamous, and I'm amazed at Crook's doing it."

"It ain't Crook," said Scott, not without a little malicious delight in Button's disgust. "He's away up at Washakie, and of course his adjutant general don't want to act or even advise until he knows all about it. You've seen fit to charge Lanier with all manner of things, and I don't wonder headquarters are staggered."

"But—*Bill Riggs*—to come and overhaul *my* regiment, when it's notorious he

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

never could command even a two-company camp without having everybody by the ears! Such men aren't fit to be inspectors!"

Indeed, there was much to warrant poor Button's disgust. He had preferred most serious charges against Lanier. He had accused him of quitting camp on campaign, quitting his guard in garrison, quitting his quarters when in arrest, failing to quit himself of a money obligation, drinking and consorting with enlisted men, and in his letter of transmittal he had intimated that there were other misdeeds he might yet have to uncover. All, said Button, on the information of veteran officers and sergeants of the regiment—notably Captains Curbit and Snaffle, Lieutenants Crane and Trotter, Sergeants Whaling and Fitzroy—and now here were both medical officers, both of his majors, two of his best captains, seven of his subalterns, and nine-tenths of the women folk at Fort Cushing taking sides

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

with Lanier and issue with him—their colonel and commander. And here, too, were Lieutenant and Mrs. Foster, highly connected, influential, wealthy, insisting that his most active and important witness, the unimpeachable Sergeant Fitzroy, had corrupted their coachman, run off with their sleigh, and ruined (this was Mrs. Foster) their horses.

Foster, first lieutenant of Snaffle's troop, seldom on speaking terms with his captain, had discovered the deed at morning stables just five minutes before the aggrieved sergeant drove in with the missing property *and* Lieutenant Ennis as escort. Foster was in a fury over it, the more so because Fitzroy had maintained, respectfully enough but most stubbornly, that the circumstances were such that he felt justified in making immediate use of any property under his care or charge, that he would explain everything to his captain and the colonel, but begged to be excused in the lieutenant's present frame

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

of mind from arguing the matter with him.

And the story Snaffle told Button before Foster could reach him went far to strengthen Fitzroy's position. Snaffle said that so far from Fitzroy's corrupting the coachman, the boot should be on the other foot, were Fitzroy corruptible—that Foster would find his coachman a double-dyed liar when he came to the truth of that runaway the night of the dance—that Foster's sleigh and carriage and driving horses had no right in a Government stable anyhow—were only there on sufferance (which was true, for Foster kept saddlers besides—all the law allowed him)—and that under the circumstances, when, as was well known, at least twenty officers and troopers on Government mounts had gone forth at night in violation of standing orders, without the commanding officer's knowledge or consent—all on the plea of rescuing Mayhew's daughter, Lieutenant Foster ought to be ashamed

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

of himself for abusing Fitzroy for taking the sleigh in hopes of having a warm nest to fetch the poor girl home in as soon as he 'd found her. "Sure, did Mr. Ennis expect her to ride back on his cantle on so bitter a night? Faith, Fitzroy was worth the whole pack of 'em put together, if they 'd only let him alone."

And that, at nine o'clock, when Ennis was sent for, was the colonel's way of looking at it. Moreover, he had a rasp up his sleeve for our massive young friend on half a dozen other counts.

"In point of fact, Mr. Ennis, that girl has simply fooled the whole party and is probably laughing at all of you. A girl that will run away without a word or line to her father, and marry an out-and-out adventurer—a mere nobody—has neither heart nor head anyhow. And now you 've interfered in a matter of discipline just as Mr. Lanier did, and I gave *you* credit for better sense. You know I had ordered that fellow's arrest."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Ennis took it all, all this and more, in grave silence and subordination. He would have gone without a word, but Button would not so have it. Button demanded his reasons, and began hitting back before Ennis had named even two. This brought on the "spat," as Barker irreverently described it, and left the colonel in no judicial mood in which to see Stannard, Sumter, and others, as see them he had to in course of the day.

But flatly he swore that Sergeant Fitzroy should not go in arrest. It was only too clear they sought to make a victim of him.

And so all Fort Cushing seemed in turmoil and trouble as the sun of the 23d went out and "Black Bill" came in, yet that sun must have been potent, for Mrs. Stannard's face, as homeward she sped, after a long talk with Mrs. Osborn, was radiant with sunshiny smiles. "You're not to know anything yet, Luce, at least until you get it from Doctor Mayhew, for

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

you never could keep it, and for a week at least it 's got to be kept."

"Well, one thing you *can* tell," said the major, "that is, if you know, and put a stop to an awful amount of censure that poor girl 's getting. Why did she leave no word for her father?"

"Because she expected to be home in two hours;" and the reader can judge just how full and satisfactory must that answer have been.

But were matters mending for Mr. Lanier? was the question still troubling Mrs. Stannard. Neither Kate nor Miriam had she seen since the night of the fire. Miriam Arnold was confined to her room. Kate Sumter would not leave her, and yet over these two devoted friends there still hovered a spell. The mutual trust and faith seemed shaken. The old confidence or intimacy was gone.

Now, whatever Mrs. Osborn had told that so cheered Mrs. Stannard, it is certain the latter could not contain herself

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

long, and that, even as the major was summoned, toward nine of the evening, to join the solemn conclave at the colonel's (where by this time Button had opened proceedings by giving "Black Bill" the best dinner a frontier larder and cellar afforded), she bustled over to the Sumters', was delightedly welcomed by her friend and neighbor, whose husband, too, had been called to council, and presently these two sages were in confidential chat.

To them presently entered the captain, electric, bristling. He wanted the bundle of latest newspapers. They had not half read them, and Colonel Button was all eagerness to see some articles concerning the campaign about which Riggs had been twitting him—asking him whom he had subsidized at this late hour to rescue his reputation, etc. Riggs had seen three long, well-written letters in the great New York *Morning Mail*, obviously the work of a correspondent on the spot, an eye-witness to the scenes he had de-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

scribed, and these letters refuted the calumnies recently heaped on Button and his comrades—gave him, in fact, high praise for soldiership, bravery, energy, even though the writer owned himself by no means one of the colonel's circle, if, indeed, one of his personal friends and admirers. Only the Sumters, at Cushing, subscribed for the *Morning Mail*. Riggs had seen the paper at Omaha. It took a search of some minutes before even the first was found. Then Sumter's eyes danced as he read, and Mrs. Sumter exclaimed over another, and for the first time in a week sounds of cheer arose in that little home. Presently Mrs. Standard read aloud a spirited, stirring paragraph, describing a dash led by Lieutenant Lanier, and then Sumter made a swoop for all three pages and said, "The quicker Button can see these the sooner he 'll come to his senses," and begging pardon for the rudeness, took the papers and his leave and almost collided with

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Kate, who at sound of the name and the glad ring of the voices had crept down-stairs for the news.

And so she had to come in and see Mrs. Stannard, and hear some few at least of the details of Dora Mayhew's romantic, runaway marriage, and while they were being told tattoo was sounded, and then Mrs. Stannard asked if she might not creep up-stairs and see Miriam; she thought she might cheer her a bit. This left mother and daughter alone together, and again, and even more painfully, Mrs. Sumter noted how sad and unresponsive was Kate at mention of Lanier.

It must have been nearly an hour later when Sumter came hurriedly in, threw his furs off in the hall, and with troubled face re-entered the parlor. His wife rose instantly, laid her head upon his arm, and asked, "What has happened?"

"A scene the like of which I never thought to hear of in this regiment. We had adjourned to the office. Snaffle had

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

been drinking a bit and got angered and flustered when Riggs cross-examined him. One thing led to another, and finally in exasperation he blurted out, 'I 'm sick of being called the accuser of Mr. Lanier. By God, I 've defended him! I 've hidden worse things than ever I told you yet, and now I 'll stand it no longer! You twit me with spying and slandering. Then by all that 's holy, you shall say here and now who 's the better man. 'T was Lieutenant Lanier himself that leapt from the window this night a week ago—the back upper window of Sumter's quarters. That 's how his hand was cut and torn, and I 've got three men that 'll swear to it!' "

He broke off suddenly, for Kate had turned, flung herself from the room and into the arms of Mrs. Stannard. One long look into the sorrowful eyes of his wife, and Sumter quickly followed, and drew the sobbing girl from those kind arms into his own.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“My child, my child,” he said, “surely you did not see him?”

“No! No! No!” was the instant answer. “No!” again she sobbed.

“Then tell me what it means, Kate, daughter. It is—I demand it!”

“Oh, father, father—it was—it was what I *heard*—when she screamed—and fell?”

“*What* did you hear?”

“The other voice—*his* voice. It said plainly, ‘Miriam, hush! Don’t you know me?’ ”

XII

“BOB,” said Mr. Ennis, sauntering in to his comrade’s bedside the following morning, “I ’m instructed to pay you a kiss.”

Lanier’s bandaged head spun on the pillow. He had but one girl in his mind.

“Wh—who?” he demanded.

Ennis threw his head back and laughed. “Nine times out of ten when a fellow is asked, ‘will you take it now or wait till you get it?’ he ’s wise to take it now. If *I ’m* any judge, I should say you ’d better wait till you can get it, which may be in less than a week.”

“Ennis, if you can quit being an ass long enough to tell me what you mean, and where you ’ve been, I ’ll thank you. If you can’t, I wish you ’d get out. *Ugashe!*” concluded Bob, with a lapse into Apache and the pillow.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Well, it probably is n’t just the kiss you were thinking of—no more was when I got it—but, Robert, my son and fellow soldier, it’s my recorded conviction that the most enviable member of the regiment this day of our Lord is your twin trooper friend Rawdon. I saw him off on his wedding tour, and he *did n’t* have on your clothes.”

Lanier’s head popped up in an instant—the one visible eye all eager interest. “*Where* were they married? *When* did they get off? Was Lowndes there?” were the questions that flew from his lips.

“Arena. On Number Six. Don’t know,” was the categorical answer. “Rawdon brought the parson out from Omaha, and the Osborns gave her away. Of Lowndes I’ve seen nothing since the night you staked him at Laramie, and what I’ve heard of him you refused to listen to. Of that callow specimen of the effete and ultra-refined Back Bay District you’ve long since had my opinion. He’s too good and gentle for this

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Western world of ours, Bob, and he and his shuddering kinsfolk suffer too much by contamination——”

“Oh, shut up, Dad! His people *did* wire him that his mother was desperately ill. They merely wanted to get him away from the campaign. He’d been gambling, the pesky little fool, with some of the Rawhide crowd, was all out of cash and dared not tell his guardian. That’s all there was to it. Soon ’s he gets his money he ’ll square up—thought perhaps he *had*, since Rawdon had enough to marry on. Lowndes owed *him* ten times what he owed me, I reckon.”

To them, thus engrossed in confidential chat, there suddenly entered the two doctors. “Black Bill,” the inspector, it seems, had given notice that he must needs have speech with the culprit, if that bandaged, blistered, and unprincipled young man were in condition to see him. “Black Bill” and his host had been having a night of it. Button was in high

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

fettle over the amazingly truthful and unlooked-for articles in the *Mail*, and as eager to know and reward their author as he had been to apprehend and punish the earlier detractor. Button had begun to "wobble," as Bill expressed it, in his spleen against Lanier until so suddenly "braced" by the truculent stand of Captain Snaffle, whose half-drunken words the previous night were by this time known all over the post.

The matter was now in the hands of Colonel Riggs, however, and it was his to determine what further action to take. Snaffle had named as his witness Sergeant Fitzroy, Private Kelley (who, though drunk on duty, had not been so drunk, said Snaffle and Fitzroy, that he could not recognize an officer when he saw him), and the third witness, to the amaze of Barker and the derision of Ennis, when told of it, was no less a person than poor Tom Rafferty, Lanier's own "striker" and hitherto devoted henchman. And to

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the consternation of Stannard, Sumter, and others, Captain Snaffle had been able to back his words. Riggs sent for the two availables, Fitzroy and Kelly, and the two had declared they could not be mistaken; that they had heard Miss Arnold's scream, followed instantly by the crash of glass. Fitzroy admitted that he was at the moment at Captain Snaffle's back door; said he ran round to the Sumters' gate; that he distinctly saw the figure of a man in a soldier's overcoat and fur cap leaping and sliding down the roof, and that a moment later he grappled with it in the dark woodshed, dropping his hold only when angrily ordered to do so, the voice adding instantly, "I 'm Lieutenant Lanier." Kelly was ready to swear to practically the same facts, though he "thought there was two of them," which, under the circumstances, was not to be wondered at. Fitzroy declared that a moment later Rafferty rushed to the spot, recognized the lieutenant, and by him was

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

sternly ordered to leave. As yet Rafferty was in no condition to affirm or deny. The excitement of the fire had brought on a relapse, and the wild Irishman was wilder than ever, "raving-like," as the steward said, in the big post hospital.

And these statements, presently, did Colonel Riggs lay before Lieutenant Lanier, in presence of Doctors Larrabee and Schuchardt, as well as Lieutenant Ennis. "I've known you three years, young sir," said he, "and I've believed in you from the first. I have reminded Sergeant Fitzroy of his previous allegations against Trooper Rawdon, as to the scuffle and assault, and, so far from showing confusion, Fitzroy promptly said, 'Certainly, that took place barely half a minute later and within ten yards of the spot.' He says his whole idea first was to drive Rawdon from the scene, and prevent his finding his officer in so humiliating a plight. He says he sought in every way at first to shield the lieutenant,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

but when all these other facts came out about the cap, the clothing, the lieutenant's absence from his quarters, his lacerated hand, etc., there was no help for it. He finally yielded to the pressure of Captain Snaffle's questions and told the truth. Kelly miserably admitted his knowledge of it and when Rafferty came to his senses, he, too, was to be catechised."

"Now, Mr. Lanier, there 's the situation. Do you care to say anything to me, or would you prefer to take counsel?"

And Bob Lanier leaning on his elbow, looked quietly up in the colonel's bearded face and answered:

"Colonel Riggs, I reckon both those men think they 're telling the truth, and I may have to prove they 're not."

"Do you mean—you *were* there?" queried old Riggs, in genuine concern.

"There, sir? Of *course* I was there—quick as I could get there, but not quick enough by any manner of means."

Riggs looked grave indeed.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“You say you may have to prove it was not you. Don’t you *know* you ’ll have to—if these witnesses are further sustained?”

“Fully, sir, and when my need is known there will be witnesses for the defense. The doctors tell me Rafferty may not come round in less than a week. When the time arrives I ’ll be ready.”

And that was the way it had to be left. That was the condition of affairs when the eighth, and final, day of Lanier’s close arrest arrived. Longer than eight, according to law, the colonel could not keep him in. Sooner than eight more, according to Larrabee, the doctors could not let him out. Yet there came a compromise and a change. “The idea of Bob Lanier spending Christmas in hospital!” said Mrs. Stannard. It was not to be thought of. A sunshiny room on the ground floor of the major’s big house was duly prepared, and thither just before sunset on Christmas eve our young soldier was piloted by

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Schuchardt and Ennis, making the trip afoot across the rearward space, yet being remanded to a huge easy chair and partial bandages immediately on his arrival.

“Black Bill,” with his incomplete report, had gone back to Omaha to further mystify the adjutant-general and to eat his Christmas dinner. The order for the court-martial hung fire until the preliminary investigation could be concluded. Fort Cushing set itself to enjoy the sweet festival as best it might, while such a problem remained unsolved. Veterinary Surgeon Mayhew had taken seven days’ leave, an eastbound train, and at three P.M. the day before Christmas came a telegram from — Arnold, Esq., of Standish Bay, Massachusetts, announcing that he would leave forthwith for the West, bringing his sister with him. The Sumters told Mrs. Stannard, and she told Bob Lanier.

It has been said that this young gentleman was an outspoken fellow, with a hit-or-miss way of saying things when once

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

his mind was made up, and by this time it would seem he had made up his mind.

“Mrs. Stannard, if you think a girl could stand the sight of such a Guy Fawkes as this, I would give much to speak ten minutes to Miss Miriam Arnold.”

“You ’re *not* a Guy Fawkes,” said Mrs. Stannard, with fluttering heart. “You ’ve lost something of your mustache and eyebrows, but very little of your good looks. Only——”

“Only what?”

“Why, it ’s going to be so much harder to see her *now* than it was before—before she——” and Mrs. Stannard faltered.

“Before she saw me playing Saint Somebody or other at the back window, and screamed? Nobody knows *I* heard it except you, and you won’t tell. Moreover, it is n’t about *that* that I have to speak.”

Mrs. Stannard’s bonny face showed instant disappointment.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“There ’s—there ’s another matter,” said Bob, with trouble in his tones.

“I so hoped——” faltered that arch match-maker.

“So did I, Mrs. Stannard,” said downright Bob, “but not with charges hanging over my head. First I ’ve got to meet the enemy.”

And yet he wished to see and speak with Miriam, who not once had set foot out of doors since the night of the fire, whose sweet face flamed at every recurring thought of that incident, whose self-betrayal covered her with shame and confusion indescribable, who would give years of her young life if she could only escape from Fort Cushing and hide herself a thousand miles away. But not until that stern puritanical father should arrive was leaving to be thought of. A week ago and the tidings of his coming would have filled her with dread; now she heard them with relief. Father coming—and Aunt Agnes! Aunt Agnes, who

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

never before had been west of the Hudson. Aunt Agnes, whose forebears had warred against witchcraft and woodcraft, against village crones and forest children, against helpless old women and stealthy young savages—all without mercy when delivered into their hands! Was it in partial reparation for the rapine, the swindling, and stealing dealt out by her Pilgrim forefathers to the Indian of the East that Aunt Agnes had become the vehement champion of the Indian of the West? President of a famous Peace Society was she, and secretary of the Standish Branch of the Friends of the Red Man, a race whom the original and redoubtable Miles had spitted and skewered and shot without stint or discrimination. And now was Aunt Agnes hastening westward with her brother, to reclaim their one ewe lamb from the wolf pack of the wilds, and incidentally to see for herself something of the haunts and habits of the red brother in whose behalf, these

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

last six months, her voice had been uplifted time and again. It was the year of a great Indian war. The blood of hundreds of our soldiery had been shed, without protest from these of Puritan stock, but they shuddered at thought of reprisals. Aunt Agnes coming to Cushing! Aunt Agnes to meet the colonel and his "red-handed horde of ruthless slayers!"

No wonder the Christmas day that dawned for Miriam Arnold in that stirring Centennial year bade fair to be the gloomiest of her life. Yet who can tell what a day may bring forth?

Sumter came in, cheery and laughing, for the late family breakfast. Guard-mounting was long over, but he had been detained by the colonel.

"It is almost comical," said he, "to see Button's delight in those letters in the New York papers. He's as curious now to know the author of those as he was furious at the supposed author of the others."

"What others?" faltered Miriam



"BUT DO YOU MEAN COLONEL BUTTON ACCUSED MR. LANIER OF
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LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

Arnold, her eyes filling with strange apprehension, her face visibly paling.

“Some bitter attacks on him that appeared in the Boston and Philadelphia papers about that night surprise of Lone Wolf’s village—the one he accused Mr. Lanier of having started.”

“Accused—Mr. Lanier!” And Miriam Arnold, with consternation in her voice, was half rising from the table.

“I had thought it best to say nothing to you about it, Miriam dear,” said Mrs. Sumter gently. “You had so many worries.”

“But Mrs. Sumter! Captain!” interrupted Miriam, wild-eyed. “Do you mean Colonel Button accused Mr. *Lanier* of those letters?”

“That was the backbone of his grievance against Lanier,” said Sumter gravely, and intently studying her face. “Why?”

“And he did ’nt—deny it? Did n’t—tell what he knew?”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Denied it, yes, but refused to tell what he knew—said it came in such a way he could not tell. Why, Miriam, what do *you* know?”

For a moment it looked as though she were on the verge of hysterical breakdown. Kate sprang to her side and threw an arm around her, but with gallant effort she regained self-control.

“I know *just* who wrote those wicked stories, and I told Mr. Lanier; and I know—and I ’m ashamed I ever *had* to know—who first told them.”

XIII

STANNARD had been summoned to Omaha, much to Button's curiosity and disquiet. Mrs. Stannard, left temporarily widowed, was none the less radiant. A romance was unfolding right under her roof, and the heart of the woman was glad. Her patient was sitting up in spick and span uniform and a sunshiny parlor. Plainly furnished as were the frontier quarters of that day and generation, the room looked very bright and cosey this crisp December evening. Christmas had come and gone with but faint celebration, as compared with former years. There had been several callers, masculine and regimental, during the earlier afternoon, but now they were off for stables. There had been an influx of army wives and daughters, to wish Bob Lanier many

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

happy returns, for this was his birthday. Shrewd woman, with all her gentle kindness and tact, was Mrs. Stannard. She had sent word to all her cronies of the interesting event and suggested a call. More significance, therefore, would be attached to a neglect to an acceptance of the hint. Perhaps this is how it happened that just about four P.M., when most people were gone, Mrs. Sumter came quietly, cheerily, convoying her two girls, and presently Bob Lanier was smiling into the eyes of Miriam Arnold, whose hand he took last and clung to longest of the three.

Not since the night of the fire had he set eyes on her. Not since the night of the dance had he spoken with her, and he was startled to see the change. Bravely though she bore herself, the flush that mantled her cheek was but momentary, and left her pallid and wan. Miriam looked as though she had been seriously ill. Kate Sumter had given him only

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

hurried and almost embarrassed words of greeting. Mrs. Sumter, however, had extended both her hands in an impulse of loyal liking and friendship, and it is doubtful if Bob even saw the daughter's face. Certainly he never noted the lack of heart in her manner. His eyes had flitted almost instantly to Miriam Arnold's, and there they hung. A few minutes of swift, purposeless chat ensued, Mrs. Stannard and Mrs. Sumter doing most of it. Then, somehow, three women seemed to drift away and become engrossed in matters of their own over by the Navajo-covered lounge, and then Miriam lifted up her eyes and looked one moment into the young soldier's face.

The bandages had been removed, though his left hand was still encased in a huge white kid glove, a discard from the hand of Ennis. Eyebrows and mustache had suffered much, and a red streak ran from the left temple down toward the neck, yet Bob looked fit and debonair and

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

happy in spite of his weight of martial woes.

“It ’s the first chance I ’ve had to thank you for the dance we—did n’t finish,” said he, noting with a thrill the tremor of the little hand that fluttered for that moment in his grasp.

“Do you think it a thing to be thankful for? I don’t.”

“I would n’t have lost it for a month’s pay, to put it mildly, and it will take more than a month’s pay to repair later damages,” said he, trying to smile and be unsentimental.

“How very much more than that you *may* lose!” said she. “Do you think I could have danced with you if I had dreamed what—what you were doing?”

“You were dancing like a dream,” said he. “Do you mean I was dancing like a nightmare?”

“You were doing what was sure to involve you in grave trouble, and—it was n’t kind to me, Mr. Lanier.”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

"I 'm all contrition for the anxiety it caused you, Miss Miriam, and for absolutely nothing else. I wish you to know that I did nothing unusual. Colonel Button was angry with me for a very different matter."

One moment she was silent; then, with lips that quivered in spite of her effort—a quiver that he saw and that set his heart to bounding madly—with lowered voice she hurried on: "And that, too, involves me, or mine. And you"—then uplifting her swimming eyes—"you *would* not tell."

And then the barrier of his pride was swept away.

"Miriam!" he cried, his hands eagerly seeking and seizing hers, only faintly resisting. "There was no *need* to tell." He was standing facing her now, close to the curtained window, his back toward the twittering trio near the dining-room door and imperceptibly edging thither at Mrs. Stannard's suggestion of coffee. Was

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

this prearranged? Bob never saw nor heeded. *She* did, however, and well knew its meaning, and the woman in her, that thrilled and throbbed at sight of the passion in his eyes the worship in his face coquetting with her own delight would have torn herself away to follow them, but her little hands were held in a grasp against which she might struggle in vain. He was lifting them to his heart, and as he drew them he was drawing her. She had to come, her long curling lashes sweeping the soft cheeks, now once more blushing like the dawn. "Oh, Mr. Lanier," he heard her murmur, as though pleading and warning. One swift glance he tossed over his shoulder at the last form vanishing through the doorway, then his dark eyes, glowing and rejoicing, fastened on hers, and quick and fervent came the next words: "There is only one thing that need be told—that *must* be told, because I've just been brimming over

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

with it all these weeks'' (ah, how the bonny head was drooping now, but drooping toward him), ''and now I can keep it back no longer. Miriam, Miriam, I love you—I love you! Have you nothing to tell me?''

One instant of thrilling suspense, then with a sob welling up from her burdened heart, the barrier of her pride and reserve went as his had gone a moment ago. ''Oh, you know—you *know* it! Who *has n't* known it since that awful night?'' she cried, and then found herself folded, weeping uncontrollably, almost deliriously, in his arms, his lips raining kisses on the warm, wet cheek. A moment he held her close-wrapped to his heart, then gradually, yet with irresistible power, turned upward the tear-stained, blushing, exquisite face, so that he could feast his eyes upon her beauty, then with joy unutterable, his lips sank upon the soft, quivering mouth in the first love kiss she

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

had ever known, and their troubles vanished into heaven at the touch.

Mrs. Stannard, you were a jewel and a general. Now, how about the major?

“For conference with the Judge-Advocate of the Department,” read the order that summoned him, and from that conference forth went our doughty dragoon in search of conquest. “It is understood,” said the officials, “that you know the circumstances under which Lieutenant Lanier became responsible for the money borrowed at Laramie by or for that young Mr. Lowndes, also that you know him.” There were other matters, but that came up first. Stannard knew and was quite willing to set forth with a plain-clothes member of the Omaha force on a mission for and from headquarters.

In a derby hat and civilian suit of the fashion of '72, the latter much too snug for him, our squadron leader of the Sioux campaign looked little like a trooper

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

as he sauntered with his detective companion into the lobby of the Paxton a few minutes later, and listened to his modernized tale of the prodigal son. It was all known to the police. Lowndes had run through the purse and patience of his Eastern kindred some two years before. Lowndes had been transported to a cattle ranch near Fort Cushing in hopes of permanent benefit, but speedily neglected the range for the more congenial society of the fort. He was well born and bred. He was made free at first at the mess, but wore out his welcome. He went on the campaign for excitement and got much more than he wanted. He took to gambling among the scouts and packers and sergeants, for the officers had soon cold-shouldered him. But he was a college man, a secret society man, as had been Lieutenant Lanier before entering the Point. Since the campaign Lowndes had been going from bad to worse; had gambled away the money sent him by his

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

relatives, and they were now sorely anxious about him. Moreover, he was needed as a material witness for the defense in the case of Lieutenant Lanier, and would answer no letters to his post-office address. He had n't been near the ranch in nearly a month, had n't been seen about Cushing City since the blizzard; was believed to be somewhere in this neighborhood in disguise.

And even as the story was being told, there came bounding down the broad stairway from above, a slender, well-built youth, in whom the civilization of the East was stamped in the stylish, trim-fitting travelling suit with cap to match, in the further items of natty silken scarf and the daintiest of hand and foot covering. It was the erect, jaunty carriage that caught the major's eye. In build, bearing, and gait the approaching stranger was Bob Lanier all over. He came straight toward them, and was tripping lightly, swiftly by when Stannard sprang to his feet.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Rawdon!” he cried, voice and manner at once betraying the soldier and the habit of authority and command. It was as imperative as the crisp, curt “Halt” of veteran sentry, and effective as though backed by levelled bayonet.

But if Stannard for an instant looked for demur, resistance, attempt to avoid, or even a trace of confusion on the part of this transmogrified trooper, the idea as quickly vanished. A wave of color, it is true, swept instantly to the young fellow’s temples, but the sudden light of recognition in his handsome eyes was frank and fearless. Quickly he whirled about, courteously he raised his cap, instinctively his heels clicked together as he stood attention to his squadron leader of the summer ago.

“I beg the major’s pardon,” said he. “I did not expect him here, and had never seen him in civilian dress.”

And now the detective, too, was on his feet, and curiously noting the pair.

“You ’re on furlough I understand, but

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

I heard—my wife said—you were in Chicago.”

“Mrs. Stannard was right, sir. My wife and her father are there now, visiting my sister. Doctor Mayhew told me of the charges against Lieutenant Lanier, and that is what brings me back at once.”

“Going back at once?” began the major, mollified, yet mystified. “I presume you know more of these matters than any one else.”

“With possibly two exceptions, sir. I hope to nab one of them here.”

“Lowndes?” queried Stannard.

“Lowndes,” answered Rawdon.

“Then you ’re just the man we want.”

That afternoon as the Union Pacific express stood ready at the Union station for the start, there boarded one of the sleepers a burly, thick-set, bluff-mannered man in huge fur overcoat, close followed by two younger companions. One of these latter, erect and graceful in bearing,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

alert and quick in every movement, with clear-cut and handsome features, was dressed with care and taste, evidently a man accustomed to metropolitan scenes and society; the other, a youth of probably his own age, though looking elder, was sallow, shabby, with a dejected down-at-the-heel expression to his entire personality that told infallibly of failure and humiliation. At a sign from their leader he dropped dumbly into a section, settled himself next the frosty window, with his head shrunk down in his worn coat-collar, and his slouch hat pulled over his eyes.

“Better pull off that overcoat and make yourself comfortable, Lowndes,” said the younger man. “You ’ve a long journey ahead.”

Whereat a tall, spare, elderly gentleman in the adjoining section slowly lowered his newspaper and turned half round, while a tall, spare, elderly, sharp-featured woman beside him, in prim travelling

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

garb, sprang from her seat and brushing the burly man aside, precipitated herself upon the shrinking object in the corner.

“Mortimer Watson Lowndes!” cried she. “Where on earth have you been?”

For answer Mortimer Watson bowed his flabby face in his hands and wept dismally.

Two days later the colonel's office at Fort Cushing was the scene of a somewhat remarkable trial. It had no force in law, yet was held to be conclusive. There was no array of uniformed judges sitting, by order, as a general court-martial. The tribunal consisted, in point of fact, of a single man, acting as judge, jury and attorney, to wit, “Black Bill” Riggs, Inspector-General of the Department of the Platte. To the unspeakable disgust of most of the officers, and the outspoken disapprobation of many of their wives, only those closely concerned in or connected with the case were invited to be present. Certain others who had just

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

happened in, thinking to hear the proceedings, were, indeed, invited to leave.

Colonel Button, as post commander and principal accuser, was, of course, at his usual desk. Colonel Riggs, his jealously regarded rival, was seated at a little table, whereon was much stationery and a stack of memoranda. Lieutenant Lanier, somewhat pale but entirely placid, occupied a chair to the left of that table, with Captain Sumter, as his troop commander and counsel, by his side. Captain Snaffle was in support of the post commander to cross-question if he saw fit. Barker, the adjutant, was present, as a matter of course. A headquarters clerk sat facing Riggs, prepared to take notes, and the trim orderly stood outside the closed door. Three or four people in civilian garb sat awaiting summons in the adjutant's office across the hall, and Sergeant Fitzroy, with trouble in his eyes and wrath in his heart, was flitting uneasily about in the domain of the sergeant-major.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“If you are ready, Colonel Button,” began Riggs, with elaborate courtesy, “I am, and let me briefly say that I have seen Trooper Rafferty at the hospital, also certain other men named by Captain Snaffle; but in order that all parties may be given opportunity to hear and to examine, and at the request of Lieutenant Lanier, who desires the fullest investigation and publicity, I have invited you and the captain to hear what I consider the really valuable evidence. Will you call in Trooper Rawdon?”

Snaffle’s face was a sight when the door opened and there entered a very self-possessed young man, in stylish and becoming civilian dress, who nevertheless stood bolt upright, with his hand raised in salute.

“Hwat ’s he mean by coming here in ‘cits’?” said Snaffle, in hoarse whisper, to his commander.

“Yes, Colonel Riggs; if this man ’s a soldier, why is n’t he in uniform?”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

With perfect respect, at a nod from Riggs, the newcomer replied: "My uniforms, and other belongings of mine, were taken from my trunk in town during my absence."

"You could have borrowed one," said Snaffle truculently.

"I told him he need not," retorted Riggs. "And now, gentlemen, we'll waste no time trying to worry the witness. Mr. Rawdon, you *were* a duly enlisted trooper, I believe. Take that chair."

"And am still, sir, as far as I know."

"But your discharge is ordered, as I understand it."

"It was applied for and recommended, and General Whipple told me in Chicago a few days ago it was settled; but that would have made no difference, sir. I should have been proud to wear the uniform until officially discharged."

Riggs wheeled in his chair. "Colonel Button, it has been fully explained to this

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

—man, and to the next, that what they tell us here is to be just what they would swear to before a court. You can decide for yourself on hearing it whether you wish them to swear to it or not. Now, Rawdon, tell us how you came to enlist.”

“As the representative of three newspapers, in Chicago and the East. They were anxious to have an Indian campaign, and the life of an enlisted man, described as it really was. I joined a squad of recruits for this regiment right after the news of the Crazy Horse Battle on Powder River.”

“Do you still hold that job?”

“No, sir;” and there was a twitch of the muscles about the corners of the mouth suggestive of amusement.

“Why?”

“I failed to—give satisfaction. Only scraps of my letters were published.”

“What did they want?”

“Criticism principally, and confirmation of the stories of abuse and ill treatment of soldiers by their officers.”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Were your letters never published?”

“Three of them, eventually, after the campaign—in the *New York Morning Mail*.”

Whereupon Riggs spun in his chair and rejoicefully surveyed Button, who sat like a man in a daze, staring, opened-eyed, at the witness. For the life of him Sumter could not suppress a chuckle.

“Then, as I understand it, you were favorably impressed with the life—and conditions?”

“In spite of hardship and privation, yes, sir; and because I found complete refutation of the stories about the officers, both as regarded their dealing with the Indians and with their own men.”

“Were there any persons with the command who knew you and your mission?”

“Two, sir, as it turned out. Trooper Cary, who enlisted at the same time I did, and a civilian, Mr. Lowndes, who recognized us at Fort Frayne. We were at college together. He and Cary became very intimate toward the last, and yet I

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

think they kept my secret in spite of our falling out."

"Do you care to tell us why you fell out?"

"I prefer that Mr. Lowndes should do that. He and Cary had been chums in college days, and though we were in the same society I did not know them then as I do now."

"You had trouble with Sergeant Fitzroy at first, did you not?"

"Almost from the start, sir."

"We have heard his version. What is yours?"

Rawdon's frank face clouded and colored one moment, but the eyes never flinched.

"It was partly on account of the lady who is now my wife, and partly on account of—money. Fitzroy is an out-and-out usurer, and has a dozen sergeants in the regiment in his debt and under his thumb, Captain Snaffle's first sergeant among them."

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“It ’s a lie!” said Snaffle.

“It ’s the truth,” said Riggs, “and I have other proofs. You will curb your tongue and your temper, Captain Snaffle, if you please. Go on, Rawdon.”

“I had reason to believe he was squeezing Doctor Mayhew. I had learned to love Mayhew’s daughter. I had a little money laid by, and was getting a good salary. I made Doctor Mayhew take enough to free himself, and won Fitzroy’s hate on both accounts.”

“You are accused of assaulting him the night of the 16th. What of that?”

“I did not even see him or speak to him. I had been in town in the afternoon, arranging for our marriage. Doctor Mayhew would not hear of it until I had got my discharge, but we had decided to be married Saturday morning, and to go East that afternoon, as important business called me. Mr. Lowndes will tell you that he owed me much money. I had lost my position as correspondent, needed

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

the cash, and pressed him for it. He had promised faithfully to have it ready, but ready it was not. I knew of his relatives in Massachusetts and urged him to telegraph, but he said he could get some of it, at least, at the fort. So I drove him and Cary out in a sleigh, left them at the store, and, circling the fort, spent two hours with Miss Mayhew. Then getting uneasy, as they did not come, drove round back to the store just in time to see Lieutenant Foster's sleigh going like the wind to town, and found Rafferty in frantic excitement. He said there was hell to pay. The lieutenant was in arrest. Lowndes and Cary had run away with some of his clothes. There 'd been a shindy up the row, and just then a soldier friend came running. 'Skip for your life, Rawdon,' said he. 'There 's been robbery at Captain Sumter's, and Sergeant Fitzroy swears it was you, and that you 've struck him and assaulted him. The colonel orders you arrested wherever found. The

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

patrols are out now!’ There was no time to explain. I lashed my team to town, caught Lowndes in cavalry overcoat and cap, the fool, and with not a cent to his name. I gave Cary a note to Miss Mayhew, which he never delivered, and took Lowndes with me on Number Six at 11.40.”

“Then you were not at Captain Sumter’s that night?”

“Nowhere near it, sir.”

Snaffle’s eyes were fairly popping from their sockets. Had n’t he said all along it was Lanier?

“Now, another matter,” continued Riggs. “That night at Laramie of which you told me. These gentlemen will be interested.”

“There was nothing remarkable in that. I had heard of the same thing being done at West Point. I heard in the nick of time of the order to the officer-of-the-day to inspect for Lieutenant Lanier. I imagined that something very serious would

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

happen to him. I knew he 'd gone to the post with Lowndes, and why. So, with my apologies now to the lieutenant, I slipped round to his tent and into his blankets."

"Did the lieutenant know of it—or of the reason?"

"Never, so far as I know. I doubt if he knows it now. Lowndes told me the lieutenant—before he entered West Point—was a member of our fraternity. That was enough."

"And so far as I am concerned," said Riggs, "that *is* enough. Have you gentlemen any questions to ask?"

"Not—now," answered Button slowly. "But I desire personally to see—the witness—later."

XIV

ONE more witness appeared before this informal court that memorable day, and with him, as prearranged, the tall, elderly civilian who had arrived with Stannard and his party from the East. Mr. Arnold came in, hat in hand, bowing gravely and profusely, with a very puzzled look in his face.

“Thank you for coming, Mr. Arnold,” said Riggs, with bluff civility. “You have met these gentlemen—Colonel Button, Mr. Barker, Mr. Lanier, Captain Sumter.” He pointedly omitted Snaffle, to whom, none the less, Mr. Arnold bowed as ceremoniously as to each of the others who had risen at his entrance. “Pray take this chair, sir. As I have explained to you, Mr. Lowndes, your nephew could not be compelled to testify before a mili-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

tary court, and need not make public admission here of what he told us at Rawdon's demand during our journey hither. I hope this is fully understood."

Mr. Arnold cleared his throat and beamed benevolently about him. The occasion seemed propitious, and a moral lesson appropriate, and he began:

"My unhappy nephew realizes, with, I trust, genuine contrition, that he has been the cause of grave trouble, not only to us, his kindred in the East, but—er—to you military gentlemen in the West. He has, prompted, as we must admit, by Mr.—Mr. Rawdon, made a clean breast of his lamentable conduct, and has promised Mr. Rawdon to repeat every word of it—er—to Colonel Button, but, as his——"

"Then we'll waste no time," said Riggs impatiently. "We'll have him in, and I can catch the afternoon train. Orderly, call Mr. Lowndes."

"Er—I was about to remark," pro-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

ceeded Mr. Arnold, "that if any—er—suit for damages, or—er—recovery of money should be in contemplation, we desire——"

"Don't fear, sir. Nobody's going to sue for damages. What we want is the quashing of all charges against this young gentleman, who has been made to suffer abominably. Ah, come in, Mr. Lowndes. Sit down, sir. You have met everybody here. Now, as speedily as possible, we'll finish this matter, and in four hours we'll be off for home."

It was but a dejected specimen of a college-bred man that sank into the chair in front of Riggs and faced him with pallid cheek and somber eyes. One look he gave at Bob Lanier, a furtive, forlorn glance, which met no recognition whatsoever. Lanier looked him over with indifference that bordered closely on contempt, but gave no other sign.

"Mr. Lowndes," said Riggs abruptly, "there is no need of going over the entire

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

story. I'll ask you to answer certain questions. Who was your earliest friend in this regiment?"

The dreary eyes turned once more toward Bob, and the nervous hands started the slouch hat in swifter revolution.

"Mr. Lanier, sir."

"How came that?"

"I knew he was of my college fraternity before I entered college, and I showed him my pin and certificate."

"That insured a welcome, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. He—he made me at home in his quarters—and tent."

"Shared the best he had with you—home, food, drink, even clothes and money, I'm told."

The flush deepened in the dejected face.

"It is all true, sir."

"Yet you quarrelled with him during the campaign."

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“I lost money gambling, and he would n’t lend me any more.”

“Did you ever pay what he had lent you?”

“Not—yet, sir.”

“Even after your quarrel did he not aid you?”

“Yes, at Laramie. I didn’t seem to have any friend left by that time, and had to go to him for help when they wired me to come home.”

“In point of fact, he enabled you to get one hundred dollars at Laramie?”

“Yes. I gave my note and he gave his word.”

“What did you do with the money?”

“Tried to win back some that I had lost, at poker, and lost most of what I had raised. I suppose I ’d have lost all of it if Rawdon had n’t caught me playing and pulled me out.”

“You owed him still more?”

“Nearly two hundred dollars, sir.”

“Did you go home?”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“I could n’t; I had only enough to bring me to Cushing, and they would n’t send me any more. I had to go to the ranch and stay.”

“Did you try to earn any money?”

“Yes, sir, writing about the campaign. Rawdon lost his position because he did n’t send what they wanted, so I thought I might. The editor did n’t know me, and asked for references, so I sent my stories to—to Mr. Arnold and my aunt. She often wrote for the papers.”

“Is that the way the Boston and other papers came to publish those scandals at the expense of Colonel Button?”

“She dressed them up a good deal and made it worse than I described,” faltered Lowndes.

“Er—let me explain, gentlemen,” interposed Mr. Arnold, who had been twitching in uneasiness. “My sister is of a very sympathetic nature, and her heart has long been wrung by the injustice meted out to the Indian. When this

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

unhappy boy wrote those—er—descriptive letters she had no reason to doubt their entire truth. Indeed, her conviction was that he was concealing, or glossing over, worse things.”

“He seems to have later supplied you with worse things, Mr. Arnold. For instance, I will ask you what was his final explanation of his need for money?”

“He begged me to send him two hundred dollars at once, saying he would be disgraced if he could not pay Lieutenant Lanier, who had won it from him at cards.”

“Mr. Lowndes,” said Riggs, “did Lieutenant Lanier ever win a dollar from you?”

“Never, sir.” And now the miserable head went down into the hot and feverish hands, and the silence in the room became something oppressive.

Riggs let him rest a minute, then went on. “Now, then, in your own way, tell us what happened that night of the 16th.”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

For a few seconds there was silence. Then, suddenly uplifting his head and looking at no one, Lowndes desperately plunged into his narrative. "I—I—was mad, I suppose, with debt and misery, and I began to drink. Rawdon told me he *must* have the money. My uncle had flatly refused to send me more. I got desperate. There was left me only one way, and that was through my cousin Miriam. I knew she was out here, and she—she had always been my best friend in my troubles at home. We'd almost been brought up together until they sent me out here. She didn't know where I was. They didn't wish her to know. But I knew if I could see her she would help me.

"Rawdon had changed into citizen's clothes in town, and I had pawned my overcoat, so he lent me his cavalry overcoat and a fur cap, drove me and Cary out to the fort, and left us at the store, promising to join him at Doctor May-

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

hew's in an hour. We were chilled from the ride, and drank more. Rafferty told me Mr. Lanier was officer-of-the-guard, and everybody else was at the dance. We filled Rafferty up, for Cary 'd made up his mind he was going to Rawdon's wedding in 'cits' instead of soldier clothes, and he was bent on borrowing a suit of Lieutenant Lanier's, even though they would hardly fit him. He swore he 'd return them the next day, and Rafferty let him have them, and he put them on in the lieutenant's back room. Then he and I went up the rear fence and caught sight of Number Five—Trooper Kelly. Cary knew him and went ahead to 'fix things' with him, as he said. Kelly had seen us come out of Lieutenant Lanier's back gate, and was suspicious. Cary, to quiet him, told him he was with Lieutenant Lanier—that we were helping Rawdon get ready for his wedding. He made Kelly drink to Rawdon's happiness, and drink three or four times, and finally left him

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

with a half full flask up the row toward Major Stannard's. Then we went to Captain Sumter's. Kelly told Cary the servants were in at Captain Snaffle's. The door was open. Cary watched below, while I hunted for my cousin's room. I found it easily. I knew they had sent her money, and orders to come home—uncle had written me as much. I found her desk. I knew it well of old, and then, to my horror, I heard her voice, and in a second she was in the room. She gave one awful scream, though I tore off my cap and begged her to know me, but she fell in a faint. Others were coming. I broke out of the back window, slid and scrambled down the roof to the shed and so to the ground. I heard men come running, so I dove into the coal-shed, where the sergeant grabbed me in the dark and I—had to make him let go, and—said I was Lieutenant Lanier. Later I crawled through a hole in the fence and started for the store, scared out of my wits. Right

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

at the next gate I crashed into two men, grappled and fighting. We all three fell in a heap. I picked myself and cap up and ran again; caught Cary at the store just jumping into a sleigh, and we lashed those horses every inch of the way, left them at a ranch gate, and ran to the station. The train was a few minutes late. Rawdon presently came, and he took me to Omaha, as I begged him, for I did n't know what could or would be done to me if I was caught. He, too, had to get away or be thrown into the guard-house, and that—that 's about all."

"You have that overcoat with you yet, I believe—that cavalry coat."

"It 's all I have had to wear, sir," was the rueful answer, as, rising, he took the garment from the arm of his chair and laid it upon the table, with the yellow lining of the cape thrown back, exposing a rent or gash, whereupon Captain Sumter arose, took from an envelope a sliver of yellow cloth, and fitted it into the gap.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“This,” said he, “I found on the hook of the storm-sash, and this,” he continued, laying beside it a rusty sheath knife, “was later found under the snow, close under the dormer window.” Then turning the overcoat inside out, he displayed on the back lining in stencil the name “Rawdon.”

“And now,” said Riggs, “we will hear the accused.”

“It is n’t necessary,” began Button, turning in his chair. “I have heard more than enough——”

“It *is* necessary, Colonel Button, if you please, for my satisfaction as investigator. Of course Mr. Lanier is not obliged to speak, but a few matters remain to be cleared up. There is yet the time-honored problem of ‘who struck Billy Patterson,’ ” and Button subsided.

“The matter is quite simple,” said Lanier. “I went direct from the dancing room to my quarters, not even stopping for my overcoat. I was chilled when I got

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

there. The fire was low, and I went back to call Rafferty. He didn't answer, so I had to lug in some fuel. His overcoat hung in the kitchen and I put that on, and just as I opened the back door there came the scream from up the row. Fire was the only thing I thought of, and I saw others running toward Captain Sumter's as I started from the back gate. Then a man rushed past me, going the other way, and then the next thing somebody sprang out from Captain Snaffle's back yard, tripped me, and I went headlong. I was on my feet in a second, but he had me round the neck, ordering me to surrender. I wrenched loose and let him have two hard ones, right and left, before he clinched again. Somebody else collided with us. We all went down. The last man was up first and ran away, with the first cap he could reach, and I followed in an effort to overtake him, knowing by that time it wasn't fire, but robbery. Then when I realized no life was in

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

danger, I remembered I was in arrest, dropped the chase, and went straight to my quarters the way I came. Both hands were bruised and left badly cut. I am sorry, of course, to have struck Sergeant Fitzroy, but the language he used was vile, and it seemed to me the only way to convince him I was *not* Trooper Rawdon."

"Colonel Button, have you any questions to ask?" demanded Riggs, as Lanier concluded.

"Why did n't you tell *me* this?" demanded Button.

"I should have been glad to, colonel. Indeed, I tried to the last time I was in the office," was the deferential reply.

"Well, gentlemen," said the colonel, as a parting shot, "between us we seem to have stirred up a pretty kettle of fish." Yet in that culinary maelstrom even Snaffle disowned either responsibility or complicity. He always *had* said Lanier was a perfect gentleman.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

And so ended Bob's arrest and most of our story. Riggs went back with his report that very afternoon. Rawdon lingered for a word with Cassidy, Quinlan, and poor remorseful Rafferty; then followed, unhampered even by his arch enemy Fitzroy, who slipped away to the stables three minutes after the close of the conference. But he was not even there when, along in the spring, Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon came out for a visit to Doctor Mayhew. Like Rawdon, he had received his discharge. Unlike Rawdon, there was serious objection to his reënlistment. Even Snaffle dare not "take him on" again.

The snows lay long and deep in the ravines and hollows. It was not until mid-May that the poor victims of the blast and blinding storm were uncovered, and the bodies of the missing were found, save that of Cary—Cary, who, having been given up for lost, turned up most unexpectedly the very day that Fitzroy,

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

applicant for reënlistment, was summarily turned down. But Cary came not of his own volition. He marched with a file of the guard. Cary's story was simple enough. Rawdon and Lowndes had hardly got away on the train when Sergeant Stowell and his party came searching. Cary hid. He was still half drunk. Some one told him of Kelly's arrest, and charged him with that and with running off the Fosters' sleigh. He dared not face the music. He forgot his precious missive to Dora Mayhew until next day. Then the storm held him. Not until the fire night did he summon up courage to sneak home. He had no money left and could buy no more liquor. He stole into Lanier's back door to return the civilian suit and recover the cavalry blouse and trousers left hanging in Rafferty's room. He could hear the lieutenant moving about overhead. He had to strike a light; he struck several matches; found the clothes, slipped out of the

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“cits” and into his own. He was cold and numb. He knew there was liquor on the sideboard in the middle room. The craze was on him, and he risked it. He struck more matches and threw the burning stumps to the floor, drank his fill, then stumbled away, intending to give himself up to his first sergeant for absence without leave. Back round by way of the store and the east front he went, but before he could reach the barracks came the appalling cry of fire—Lanier’s quarters! His doing beyond doubt, and now, in dismay and terror, he fled from the post. Some ranch folk took him in next day, and cared for him awhile, then sent word to the fort. Poor Cary had Lanier to plead for him before his trial, but three months’ hard labor was the least the law would allow. He was still “doing time” when his happier friend of college days came back with his sweet young wife.

By which time, too, another wedding

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

was announced as near at hand. Only two days did Mr. Arnold and Aunt Agnes allow Miriam in which to prepare for the homeward journey, but it is safe to say that in that brief time their views of frontier life and people had undergone marked amendment, for they had found an old expounder of their faith in the post chaplain, for one thing, and many surprising facts as to officers, men, and Indians for another. There came a bright wintry afternoon, at the fag end of the year, when the station platform held a lively little assembly waiting for the east-bound express. The colonel and his wife were there, the former by no means the blood-thirsty warrior of the elder's imagination. The Stannards had come in, and the Sumters, Kate, and "Dad" Ennis, the chaplain, and both doctors, and all these surrounded the brother and sister and held them in cheery converse, while Bob and Miriam sauntered, self-centred, away.

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

There was a sheltered, sunshiny little nook down the platform, between the baggage and express sheds, with a high, board fence at the back, to keep off the north wind and human intruders. They passed it twice in their stroll, but the third time turned in—it was so good to get out of the piercing wind—as well as out of sight.

What wonders a few days of delight will do for a girl! The pallor and lassitude had gone. The soft eyes were brimming with bliss. The rounded cheeks had regained all their bloom. The sweet, rosebud mouth seemed all smiles and warmth and witchery, and Lanier's eyes were glowing as he drew her to his heart and gazed down into the depths of those uplifted to his.

“That brute of a train has been late for a week,” said he, “but to-day it comes on time. It is going to be a long, long wait for May. How does papa seem to take it now?”

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

“Papa is quick to make amends when he has wronged—any one, and now he *knows*.”

“Well, so does Aunt Agnes, Miriam, yet *she* does n’t approve.”

“Well, Aunt Agnes, don’t you know—she ’s different. She ’s a good deal like other women I know. When she ’s placed somebody else in a false position, she thinks that person ought to be very sorry for her, and sympathize with her, for having been deceived and misled. She thinks you ought to say how sorry *you* are.”

“How can I say I ’m sorry when I ’m so glad—*all* glad?”

“Well, then, there ’s Cousin Watson, don’t you know? He was always her pet. He was brought up by a weak mother and a doting aunt, and she knows you don’t approve of him.”

“Does she expect a man to approve of one who maligned him as Lowndes maligned me?”

“You should see his earlier letters

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

about you! Why, if I 'd known anything of them I would never dared to meet such a paragon."

"And yet, after all, he turned to and painted me black as an imp of Satan. What had I done but good to him? I never took or won a penny of his."

A moment of silence, then the fond eyes looked up.

"You won something he wanted and thought—*was* his—he never had any sense. Won't you try to forgive him—for my sake—Bob?"

His arms went round and folded her closely; his face bowed down to hers. There was a worldless moment, then the sound of a distant whistle, of nearer shouts of "T-r-a-i-n." The dark mustache, the unsinged side, was sweeping very, very near the soft curve of those parted lips.

"What ransom will you pay?" he murmured. "I 've not yet felt these arms about my neck. I 've kissed you, heaven

LANIER OF THE CAVALRY

be praised, but, Miriam, have you ever kissed me?"

"T-r-a-i-n! Train, train! You 'll be left!" again came the shrill feminine appeals, and with them, approaching, unwelcome, unheeded footfalls. With sudden, impulsive movement she threw her arms about his neck and upraised her lips to his. One moment of silence, two seconds of bliss, then "Dad" Ennis's voice, barely a dozen yards away: "Come forth into the light, you wanderers!" There was barely time for Bob's fervent words:

"If I could n't forgive him after *that*, I 'd deserve a dozen weeks' arrest."

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